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ABSTRACT

The Fluency First in English as a second language (ESL) project at City College (New York) began as a result of the high failure rate among ESL writing students at the college, and the fact that this kept many students from entering the regular college courses. Revision on the ESL reading and writing curricula, beginning in 1987, focused on incorporating the whole language approach to developing fluency and resulted in a significant departure from conventional ESL pedagogy. Faculty workshops were developed, and subsequent implementation of changes in ESL teaching resulted in improved student writing and in higher student success rates. The new curriculum was formalized and training was offered more broadly and consistently. Course repetition rates have declined substantially, college-level writing test passing rates have increased from 33 percent to 70 percent, and the ESL passing rate in freshman composition courses has almost doubled. ESL teachers express satisfaction with the curriculum, faculty workshops, and student progress. Students have evaluated the program positively, and teachers from other parts of the country have responded enthusiastically to conference presentations about the approach. (MSE)

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# Fluency First in ESL.

ED 423 662

## Grantee Organization

Department of ESL, R 5/218
City College, CUNY
138th & Convent Avenue
New York, New York 10033

## Grant Number

P116B00954

## Project dates

Starting date: August 1, 1990
Ending date: July 31, 1993
Number of months: 36

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## FIPSE Program Officer

John E. Donahue

## Grant Award

| | |
|---|---|
| Year 1: | $ 65,304 |
| Year 2: | 98,745 |
| Year 3: | 139,872 |
| Total: | $ 303,921 |

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## SUMMARIES

The increasing number of ESL students at City College, CUNY, who were not prepared for college level reading and writing spurred the CCNY ESL faculty to revise its curriculum to emphasize developing fluency first rather than correctness, a radical transformation of ESL instruction with implications for the way speakers of minority dialects are taught. In our three years we trained almost seventy ESL teachers in the Fluency First approach, collected data on the results of implementing this approach, and disseminated information about the approach at conferences and in professional publications.

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TITLES OF PROJECT REPORTS/PRODUCTS:

Final report: Fluency First in ESL (attached)

Other products: Achieving Fluency in English, Achieving Clarity in English, both by A. MacGowan-Gilhooly (Kendall-Hunt, 1991); Fluency First: A Whole Language Guidebook for ESL and BW Teachers, by E. Rorschach; several articles listed in the appendix.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Title: Fluency First in ESL

Grantee Organization: The City College of the City University of New York

Project Directors:

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Fluency First started as a result of concern over the high failure rate among ESL writing students at City College and the fact that this kept them from entering the regular college courses. In the Fall of 1987 the ESL Department began revising the writing and reading curricula in order to improve the students' passing rates in departmental courses and their eventual success in Freshman English and other writing/reading-intensive courses they take after they have left the ESL program. The resulting pilot curriculum, called "Fluency First," a whole-language approach to ESL instruction, evolved from research in literacy and second language acquisition, and resulted in a stark departure from typical ESL pedagogy.

We developed faculty workshops to help some of the ESL teachers in our program, most of whom are adjuncts, learn about this new approach. They subsequently implemented it in many of the courses in our program. The resulting improvements in students' writing as reported by these teachers, as well as the visible improvement in passing rates, encouraged us to formalize the Fluency First curriculum, offer training on a more widespread and consistent basis, and conduct research on the effects of this curriculum on students' success in and beyond the ESL program.

With funding from FIPSE, we've been able to document several improvements: First of all, course repetition rates have declined dramatically, to nearly half their previous level. We've also increased the passing rates on the college-required writing test from about 33% to more than 70%, and the ESL passing rate in Freshman Composition has almost doubled. Teachers in the ESL program have expressed satisfaction with the new curriculum, with the workshops, and with their students' work; students have also

evaluated the program very positively, despite the amount of work required. In addition, teachers from other areas of the country have responded enthusiastically to conference presentations about the Fluency First approach, resulting in several requests for on-site consulting, and we've trained seventy teachers in CUNY colleges and New York City public schools in the Fluency First approach.

## PURPOSE

Fluency First addressed the problem of underachievement and failure among ESL writing students, a problem which had kept roughly two-thirds of them from achieving their educational goals, since each semester that many did not pass the writing assessment test, a prerequisite for enrolling in regular college courses. The Fluency First project also addressed the problems of training teachers in this new and very different approach to learning, and built a database from students' transcripts which shows that now over twice as many students are passing the writing courses and tests and thus are now being enabled to pursue their educational goals.

## BACKGROUND AND ORIGINS

The Fluency First project stemmed from a major curricular change in ESL writing courses which had been piloted by the ESL department from 1987-1990 in our three-level writing course sequence. A whole-language approach replaced the former grammar-based approach, and required students to do far more real reading (several novels and academic texts) and real writing (writing novels and extensive projects) than previously required, and postponed emphasizing correctness in grammar until the advanced level. This allowed students to become fluent, clear writers and fluent, critical readers before having to demonstrate correctness in either area. The new approach was initiated because of the widespread failure of our students in ESL writing, evidenced by high course repetition rates and high failure rates on the college's required writing test.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The main features of the project were:

1. Training college, high school and elementary teachers in the Fluency First approach each year for three years, through a series of ten workshops, classroom observations and consultations, readings and teachers' own classroom-based research.

2. Conducting research on the success rates of ESL students by comparing quantitative data from semesters prior to Fluency First and those since the approach has been in full swing; and by

analyzing qualitative data on students' writing over time as they progress through the fluency-clarity-correctness curriculum.

3. Disseminating the project's approach and results through scholarly publications, presentations and workshops at professional conferences and schools, and through an electronic-mail list devoted to discussions of the Fluency First approach and whole-language philosophy.

EVALUATION/PROJECT RESULTS

1. Training workshops: Over the course of the the three-year grant period, we worked with about seventy teachers from CUNY colleges as well as from New York City public schools. More than 90% of the fulltime and adjunct faculty within the ESL program at CCNY have been trained in the new approach. All of them responded positively to the workshops on questionnaires designed by the project directors, and more than 90% of them have implemented part (if not all) of the Fluency First approach in their teaching. In addition, at least two programs within CUNY have used the Fluency First approach as a model for grant applications as they work to revise their own ESL and writing curricula.

2. Qualitative and quantitative research on students: The project directors have begun longitudinal case studies of approximately 40 students who started at the lowest level in the ESL program at City College. Initial findings show that the students' writing has become more sophisticated syntactically and semantically, as well as more interesting and coherent. Students themselves report being more committed to their writing and much prouder of what they are able to do.

Data compiled by the project's research assistant demonstrate increased success rates in ESL and Freshman English courses for ESL students. For example, in 1983, only 38.04% of students who took all three ESL writing courses passed ESL 30 in one attempt. That figure jumped to 77% by 1991. In addition, the average number of times an ESL student had to take the Freshman English course decreased from 1.47 in 1983 to 1.07 in 1991. Also, the average number of times an ESL 30 student took the college-required writing assessment test before passing decreased from 4.56 in 1983 to 2.41 in 1991.

3. Over the past three years the project directors and other Fluency First teachers have presented at numerous local, state, national, and international conferences, giving papers and conducting workshops on the Fluency First approach. These presentations have been so successful that, as a result, we have been asked to help teachers in California, Florida, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Virginia learn about and implement a Fluency First approach in their programs. More than 100 teachers have participated in these various workshops. In addition, TESOL invited us to lead a Fluency First teleconference which they taped

and are now marketing as a TESOL publication. Finally, the project directors have published two books, are writing two more, and have published two articles in scholarly publications as well as several articles in other professional journals.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The project achieved its goal of training the CCNY ESL faculty and numerous faculty from other CUNY campuses, other colleges, high schools, and elementary schools. We have also succeeded in demonstrating the superiority of the Fluency First approach over traditional approaches, as it helps many more ESL students to succeed in passing required writing courses. And we have succeeded in offering training for those interested in learning to implement a Fluency First approach. We have also established a Fluency First office which will continue to be a resource center for those interested in the approach, and we have obtained the official approval of the ESL Department for the Fluency First curriculum.

The insights we have gained from this project include understanding the importance of including all faculty in dissemination and continuation activities as well as in developing the curriculum. We also realized the importance of the pilot work we did before applying for the grant--this work gave the project a solid foundation and provided us with initial research data to interest others in the Fluency First approach.

FLUENCY FIRST IN ESL

FINAL REPORT

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Fluency First in ESL Project, supported by FIPSE, began in August 1990. But before that date the Department of ESL at The City College of the City University of New York had been working for three years to revise its reading and writing curriculum in order to improve retention and passing rates for our students. The new curriculum reversed the traditional sequence of ESL instruction by removing correctness and grammar from the center of instruction at the lower levels, replacing these with a focus on developing fluency in reading and writing--Fluency First.

Based on recent research and theories in literacy and second language acquisition, the Fluency First approach developed by our department requires students to do massive amounts of reading and writing at each level, moving from fluency to clarity to correctness as they progress through the three levels of our program. The increased amount of reading provides linguistic input necessary for language acquisition, and the increased amount of writing provides the opportunity to use the language meaningfully. Other major components of the approach--group work, student-control of learning, reading journals and learning logs--come from a whole language philosophy of learning.

In the first three years of piloting the new curriculum (1987-1990), we noticed an improvement in the students' reading and writing abilities and decided to officially adopt the curriculum. But with a large number of our courses taught by adjunct instructors (75%-85% each semester), we decided to apply

for a grant to provide stipends for training teachers in the new approach, as well as to support more formal study of the results of the new curriculum. We also requested money to support travel to national conferences in order to present the results of our research.

With the funds from FIPSE, over the past three years we have trained nearly seventy teachers in the Fluency First approach, from several colleges in the CUNY system, as well as from a small number of New York City public schools. Participating faculty have all responded positively to the workshops and to using this approach with their students. A few, working within more traditional programs, have found it difficult to adopt the approach completely, but others are using our work to support their own grant requests to institute a Fluency First approach in their programs (for instance, Kingsborough Community College and City College's Composition Program).

Working with so many teachers means that uncounted numbers of students at various levels have been and will be reached--not just during these three years, but for years to come. Within City College alone, over the past three years nearly 1,500 ESL students have been in a course following the new curriculum. With approximately 350 new students every semester, we have the potential of helping thousands of ESL students by the year 2000. Both our quantitative and qualitative data show the new curriculum to be very effective (see evaluation section for details), with many more students succeeding in passing the college-required writing test, much lower course repetition rates, and a much higher passing rate in Freshman English.

Research assistants have collected quantitative data from students' transcripts (1983, 1986, 1987-1991), tracking the progress of students through the three levels of our program and beyond, into mainstream courses. Analysis of the data shows a steady increase over time in students' success in our program and beyond. For instance, only 38.04% of students who had begun at the lowest of the program in 1983 passed the highest level in one term; in 1991 this had increased to 77%. In 1983 ESL students passed Freshman English in an average of 1.47 attempts, which decreased to 1.07 by 1991.

In three years we have presented at more than thirty conferences at the local, state, and national level. These conference presentations have resulted in our working extensively with several schools across the country who are considering adopting the Fluency First approach--in San Francisco (six community colleges), Ft. Lauderdale (Broward Community College), Virginia (Northern Virginia Community College), and Philadelphia (Temple University)--as well as in generating interest in the approach from teachers and programs in Arizona, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and other parts of the country.

All of the above goals were set in the original grant proposal. In addition to these, we have accomplished others: We have trained twenty-five faculty experienced with the approach to lead workshops and have been able to use their expertise in workshops within New York City as well as at conference presentations. We have begun a Fluency First electronic mail list (TESLFF-L, a sublist of TESL-L), with members from around the country as well as around the world discussing issues of whole

language philosophy and the Fluency First approach. And we have developed materials to support faculty as they learn about and use the Fluency First approach.

The results of our efforts over the past three years have been encouraging and enlightening. As we continue our research, supported this year by funds from the School of Humanities at City College, we hope to further our understanding of how ESL students acquire English and become stronger readers and writers.

PURPOSE

The overriding purpose of the Fluency First project has been to increase students' success rates in the ESL writing sequence, thereafter in English Composition, and in passing the college-required writing test. Prior to the initiation of Fluency First, students' success rates were unacceptably low: only about one-third succeeded. The principal reason was that they were not acquiring sufficient English skills in the existing ESL curriculum, which basically stressed grammar and correctness, as do most ESL curricula.

Our understanding from second language acquisition and literacy development theory was that we were proceeding inappropriately in the demands we were making of our students. We realized that our students needed far more exposure to English--the kind of exposure which would promote lots of natural, easy language acquisition--and that they weren't getting it in our courses. To become competent writers and readers, they needed to read and write far more than they were doing, to greatly expand their vocabularies, and to achieve automaticity and comfort with English reading and writing. More often than not, they were

failing the required writing test because their writing was "awkward" or "incoherent." They needed to become more fluent in English, more facile in writing English, and better composers.

The problem was how we might convince faculty to try a new approach that would be a radical departure from typical ESL methods, requiring not only new methods, but a new understanding of how people learn and how they acquire language. We spoke to faculty individually about our ideas, and then decided to ask them to try a whole language approach. Some felt and still feel that the old approach was adequate, but most disagreed and acknowledged that we needed to change our direction.

BACKGROUND AND ORIGINS

We approached the adjunct faculty teaching our beginning level (ESL 10) in the Fall of 1987 and asked them to try a whole-language approach in ESL 10, offering them workshops to prepare for the change. They all tried it and loved it, reporting that students were reading and writing far better than the teachers had ever seen in ESL 10.

The following semester, the teachers of the intermediate level (ESL 20) agreed to pilot the approach in that course with students moving up from ESL 10. Again, we offered training in whole language, a curriculum that required massive language use, and support for the teachers. And again, those teachers reported that students' writing had progressed far more steadily and further than in previous ESL 20 classes.

In the next few semesters, more teachers became interested in our pilot curriculum, both in and out of City College, and more wanted to know if we could demonstrate if the approach was really

working better. These requests inspired us to apply for a FIPSE grant to train teachers, continue to implement the Fluency First approach, and conduct research on and dissemination of our students' success rates before and after our implementation of the approach.

For the project to be undertaken, we needed the approval of the ESL department. Seeing the faculty's and students' enthusiasm for the approach, as well as some preliminary data on success rates, the fulltime faculty agreed that we should continue to pilot the approach and seek funding to support training, research and dissemination. The college's administration was very supportive of the approach, giving released time for us to train teachers and for trainees, as well as providing office space, equipment, and other kinds of support once we received the FIPSE grant. There continued to be some skepticism on the part of some of the faculty (two or three), but the others were so committed to the new approach that we went ahead with the FIPSE grant proposal, and received a three-year grant for 1990 through 1993.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Our project had the following main features: 1) conduct a yearly series of workshops for teachers interested in using the approach; 2) collect quantitative and qualitative data on past and current ESL students within and beyond the program; and 3) present results of the research at conferences, and publish articles about the Fluency First approach in professional journals. In addition, we 4) trained experienced Fluency First teachers to be workshop leaders and 5) set up a Fluency First electronic-mail list (TESLFF-L). (For details of results in each item, see section on

evaluation/project results.)

Workshops

We knew, from our pilot work with the curriculum, that teachers would need extensive support if they were to learn about and use the Fluency First approach. Also, since most college-level ESL courses in New York City are taught by adjunct teachers, we knew that their tenuous financial arrangements would make them hesitate to commit time without remuneration--they are all committed professionals, but, to earn a living wage, they must teach 20+ hours weekly at several campuses, and their time is at a premium. In short, we knew we could not interest a large number of teachers in Fluency First without offering them money for their time.

The workshops required a large investment of time on their part--in addition to attending the workshops (twenty hours over two semesters), teachers had to read one book and several articles about whole language philosophy (the costs of all materials were covered by the grant), keep teaching logs and reading journals, and be observed. This in-service workshop model, developed from our experiences with the New York City Writing Project as well as with other teacher educators, supports the teachers as they look at what they do, consider options, and study what happens to their students' learning.

Research

Quantitative

For the full three years of the grant, we have had a research assistant collecting data from students' transcripts. We now have data on ESL students in sample years prior to the implementation

of the approach, and years subsequent to its implementation. These data demonstrate very strong gains since the approach has been implemented and serve well to convince teachers in other programs to try a similar approach.

Qualitative

The project directors are also conducting case study research on forty students' writing development over the course of ESL 10, 20 and 30, and their language acquisition patterns as evidenced in those writings. These students represent the major language groups at CCNY: Latinos, Chinese-speakers, and Haitians, as well as various other groups.

Initial findings show that, over the course of the program, students' writing improves syntactically and semantically, the content of their writing is much more interesting, and students become more committed to what they write. The qualitative data will help to answer questions about how students acquire a second language as well as about the processes they undergo in order to improve as writers.

Presentations and Publications (Dissemination)

Conferences

The project directors and other faculty involved with the Fluency First project have given papers and conducted workshops at numerous local, state, national, and international conferences. They have also been invited to give papers at conferences, as key-note or plenary speakers, and have led a teleconference on the Fluency First approach, sponsored by TESOL International. These conference presentations have helped disseminate information about the approach and have, in turn, led to more workshops with ESL

faculty around the country. At these presentations and the resultant workshops, we have also encouraged attendees to join the TESLFF-L e-mail list, which offers an opportunity for on-going support as they try out various aspects of the approach in their teaching.

Publications

Two ESL textbooks have been published about the Fluency First approach, by Kendall-Hunt (1991). A third book, a guide for teachers using the approach, has been accepted for publication by Heinemann-Boynton/Cook; and the project directors are currently working on a fourth book reporting the results of their quantitative and qualitative research. In addition, several articles have been published in professional journals and newsletters, and two others are in submission. All these various publications help disseminate information about the project and the Fluency First approach; teachers have responded positively to the two textbooks in particular, which they have found useful in helping them plan their courses and assist their students in doing the difficult work required by the approach.

Training Workshop Leaders

The project directors found, during the first and second years of the grant, that they needed help in conducting workshops, particularly as interest in the Fluency First approach spread across the country and requests for workshops outside New York City began to come in. It became clear that having a cadre of trained Fluency First workshop leaders would benefit the project in several ways: The project directors would have assistants in doing the work necessary to lead successful workshops; the newly trained workshop leaders would gain more expertise in the theory

underlying the approach; the approach itself would have dozens of new "official" representatives who could disseminate information about it at conferences and in publications. We trained two groups of workshop leaders, who have since gone on to assist in conducting half-a-dozen on-site workshops and in giving papers and conducting workshops at four conferences.

TESLFF-L

TESL-L, an e-mail list, was started by CUNY faculty in 1991. One of its owners is also actively involved in the Fluency First approach, and as a result of our work with her, the project directors joined this list and started a Fluency First sublist, as another means of disseminating information about the approach. The sublist now has more than 100 members, from around the United States as well as from several other countries, and discussions on the list range from types of books to read at each level, to ways to deal with plagiarism, to criteria for fluency, clarity, and correctness.

EVALUATION/PROJECT RESULTS

Quantitative data

The most impressive results we have on the success of the Fluency First approach compare data on student success rates in ESL writing courses, on the college-required writing test, and in the Freshman English course before and after we implemented the new curriculum.

The data base we have developed (Chart 1) includes the following numbers of students for each of four years, 1983[1] and 1986 (before Fluency First was implemented), and 1989, 1990, and 1991 (after it was implemented):

[1] Note that each year includes two semesters--Spring and Fall; summer course data are not included.

CHART 1

| | Year | n |
|---|---|---|
| Pre F/F | 1983 | 815 |
| | 1986 | 820 |
| Post F/F | 1989 | 824 |
| | 1990 | 524[2] |
| | 1991 | 853 |

Success rates in ESL 30 (Charts 2 and 3)

We see evidence of success within the ESL program, with a dramatic increase in the number of students who have passed ESL 30 in one try. In 1983, only 38.04% of students who took all three ESL writing courses passed ESL 30 in one attempt. That figure jumped to 77% by 1991.

CHART 2

| | Took 3 Courses | | Passed ESL 30 in one try | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Year | Total n | n | % |
| Pre F/F | 1983 | 184 | 70 | 38.04 |
| | 1986 | 250 | 138 | 55.2 |
| Post F/F | 1989 | 302 | 178 | 58.94 |
| | 1990 | 299 | 97 | 32.44 |
| | 1991 | 300 | 231 | 77.0 |

[2]We have not yet determined an explanation for the low n for this year.

There is similar progress in students who took only ESL 20 and ESL 30:

CHART 3

| | Took 2 Courses | | Passed ESL 30 in one try | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Year | Total N | n | % |
| Pre F/F | 1983 | 331 | 171 | 51.6 |
| | 1986 | 234 | 130 | 55.5 |
| Post F/F | 1989 | 222 | 134 | 60.0 |
| | 1990 | 202 | 145 | 71.78 |
| | 1991 | 188 | 161 | 85.6 |

Success rates in Freshman English (Chart 4)

The average number of times an ESL student takes English 110, the Freshman English composition course, has decreased dramatically. In 1983, ESL students took English 110 an average of 1.47 times, while that had dwindled to 1.07 on average by 1991, a 27% decrease.

CHART 4

| Average attempts before passing ENG 110 | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Year | tries |
| Pre F/F | 1983 | 1.47 |
| | 1986 | 1.28 |
| Post F/F | 1989 | 1.31 |
| | 1990 | 1.29 |
| | 1991 | 1.07 |

Success rates on mandatory writing test (Chart 5)

Performance on the mandatory writing assessment test (WAT) tells a similar story. The average number of times an ESL 30 student took the test before passing was:

CHART 5

Average attempts before passing WAT

| | Year | tries |
|---|---|---|
| Pre F/F | 1983 | 4.56 |
| | 1986 | 4.38 |
| Post F/F | 1989 | 3.68 |
| | 1990 | 2.97 |
| | 1991 | 2.41 |

Qualitative data

To collect qualitative data, the project directors have begun several case studies of students who began at the lowest level of our program in 1990 and 1991, looking specifically at how the students' writing changed while they were in the ESL program, as well as what happened to their writing once they left the program. Our research at this point shows us that students' writing becomes much more sophisticated syntactically and semantically, and that their writing is much more interesting and coherent.

Students demonstrate a pride in and commitment to their writing that at the beginning of the semester often seem unachievable. Further, in end-of-term evaluations, students report being able to see visible improvement in their writing, in grammar as well as in content. They feel more confident and comfortable using the language. Many of them report that these

courses required them for the first time to do not only extensive writing, but extensive reading as well. For some, this was the first time they had read a novel in any language.

Workshops

Each year we hoped to work with twenty teachers, for a total of sixty teachers over the course of the grant. In the first year, we had fifteen teachers, all from City College. These teachers met in one group, at the City College campus, led by the two project directors, who divided up responsibilities for reading and commenting in the teachers' journals as well as for conducting observations and post-observation conferences.

In the second year, from various colleges in the CUNY system, we had twenty teachers. These teachers met in two groups, each led by one of the project leaders. One group, centered in the Bronx, had teachers from CUNY campuses located in the Bronx and Manhattan. The other group, centered in Manhattan, had teachers from CUNY campuses located in Queens, Manhattan, and Brooklyn. Traveling to observe the teachers in these groups required large chunks of time.

In the third year, from CUNY colleges and New York City public schools, we had thirty. To attract public school teachers, we offered college credit (3 hours) for the workshop as an option to receiving a stipend--seven high school and six primary school teachers participated, and four of these chose to receive credit. This final year we had three groups: college-level, high school level, and primary school level. The two project directors each led a group, and a third leader was one of the experienced teachers we had trained to lead workshops. We each also had an assistant, again from the pool of workshop leaders. As with the

previous year, the observations required travel through four of the city's five boroughs.

Each year we asked workshop participants to fill out a questionnaire at the end of the series, assessing the effectiveness of the workshops in helping them understand and use the Fluency First approach. All participants responded positively on the questionnaires, noting specifically their enjoyment of the opportunity to meet with other ESL faculty and discuss issues of teaching and learning.

Fewer than 10% of the participants decided not to use part or all of the Fluency First approach; the rest reported finding the approach instrumental in helping their students acquire more English and become stronger readers and writers. The participants also appreciated the materials developed by the project directors and distributed and discussed in the workshops.

Dissemination

The project directors have been extremely successful in disseminating results of the project, at professional conferences and in various publications. We have received queries about the Fluency First approach as a result of our conference presentations, as well as in response to the articles.

Conference presentations

The project directors and other faculty involved with the Fluency First project have given papers and conducted workshops at numerous local, state, national, and international conferences. A partial list of these conferences includes the following:

International: TESOL International (1993, 1992, 1991).

National: National Association of Bilingual Educators (NABE, 1992); Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC,

1993, 1992, 1991); National Council of Teachers of English Spring Conference (NCTE, 1992).

State: New York State TESOL (1992, 1991).

Local: CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors (1993); CUNY ESL Council (1993, 1992, 1991).

In addition, the project directors have been invited to give papers at the following: Oklahoma TESOL (OKTESOL, 1991), TESOL International Teleconference (1993), Pennsylvania TESOL East (PennTESOL, 1993).

Publications

Publications about the Fluency First approach include the following books: Achieving Fluency in English and Achieving Clarity in English, by Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly (Kendall-Hunt, 1991; both currently being revised for second editions); Fluency First: A Whole-Language Guidebook for ESL and BW Teachers, by Betsy Rorschach (Heinemann-Boynton/Cook, 1994); and The Fluency First Project at CCNY, by MacGowan-Gilhooly and Rorschach (in progress). Articles about the project have been published in the Journal of Basic Writing and College ESL, as well as in various smaller, local publications. (A fuller list of publications can be found in the Appendix.)

Please see our outside evaluator's report in the appendix for more information on the project results.

Plans for continuation and further dissemination

This year, the Fluency First curriculum has been officially accepted by the ESL department. The School of Humanities at City College, with a $20,000 grant, is supporting 1) a fourth year of workshops (with participating teachers from CCNY and other CUNY colleges), 2) further work by the research assistant in collecting

and analyzing data on students' success rates, 3) an office, equipment, and supplies, and 4) travel to conferences for presentations. An additional grant (approximately $3,000) from CUNY is supporting monthly meetings among ESL faculty to continue discussions of the Fluency First approach and other teaching issues. City College is also providing two work-study assistants, hook-up to electronic mail networks, telephone service, and computer access to students' transcripts.

There continue to be requests for information and workshops as we present at professional conferences. The e-mail network at this point is our major means of dissemination, and through it we have received requests for assistance in developing Fluency First curricula in Massachusetts and Minnesota, as well as in using this approach in classrooms across the country. (Samples of e-mail correspondence are in the appendix.)

We will be inviting groups of teachers to come to CCNY for Fluency First workshops and to observe the approach in action. We've developed a credit-bearing graduate course based on these workshops, and we are looking into possibilities for conducting workshops via distance-learning. To these ends, we will be submitting a proposal for a FIPSE dissemination grant in January.

Within the next year we will complete the first stage of our case studies of ESL students, which will become the major focus of the book detailing the results of our research. We will also continue collecting and analyzing quantitative data about students who have gone through the program, and we plan to have these data analyzed for statistical significance.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Everyone involved with this project--students, teachers,

research assistants, outside evaluator, and project directors--have all judged it to be a great success. Not only were we able to complete the project as proposed to FIPSE in 1990, but we also have formalized an approach to ESL instruction that enables students to become strong readers and writers and to function in a college environment.

We have, over the past three years, also developed important insights--about our own approach and about instituting changes in curricula.

The Fluency First Approach The preliminary work we did in piloting the approach has been instrumental in providing data that help convince teachers to try this with their own students. Also, as we evaluated our work each year, we discovered how much the other faculty contributed to the strength of this approach--by helping us clarify exit criteria for each level and develop materials to use in the classrooms. Because they have contributed to the curriculum, they feel committed to it, and are willing to keep working to improve it and ensure its success.

At this point we have located three issues with the Fluency First approach requiring attention:

1) Although the ESL program at CCNY includes oral skills and communication courses, the Fluency First approach has yet to take these courses into account. We have focused on reading and writing, putting speaking and listening in a secondary position. As our department formalizes its curriculum for every course, we hope to remedy this problem.

2) We do not yet have a satisfactory way to assess ESL students' reading abilities. While there are several reading tests available to us, none gives a clear, consistent, fair

picture of what our students do when they read. We hope to work on developing an alternative means of assessing our students' reading abilities, but this is a difficult task, requiring much intensive work.

3) Students and faculty have reported to us that the move from fluency to clarity is perhaps too great a leap for many students; we will need to reexamine the types of writing students do at each level, as well as how much attention is paid to fluency, clarity and correctness at each level, in order to address this issue.

Instituting Changes We have found that the most resistant faculty have been those who have been left out of the process of revising the curriculum. As we bring more teachers into this process--as we recognize their various areas of expertise and call on them to help us strengthen the curriculum--we begin to break down resistance. This lesson is one that we carry to all our presentations and workshops at other schools: Any major change requires the participation of all faculty, so that they can feel in control of that change (rather than controlled by it).

In our workshops at other schools, we also emphasize that our assignments and books were developed for City College--with a group of ESL students and a course layout probably not found anywhere else. Any program wishing to use the Fluency First approach must adopt it for their own program--to meet their own students' needs and to fit the restrictions set out by semester-length, number of levels, etc.

# APPENDICES

Information for FIPSE

We found the following assistance valuable:

1) The yearly project directors' meeting in Washington. This gave us the opportunity to meet with other project directors, to look at samples of work produced by other projects, and to see our own project within a context.

2) The encouragement and confidence of our program officer (John Donahue). Mr. Donahue continually reasssured us about our choices and decisions, and told of us his excitement about what we were doing.

We suggest FIPSE consider instituting the following:

1) A FIPSE e-mail network, so program officers can check in more regularly with projects. (We realize FIPSE tried instituting something along these lines three years ago, but we want to encourage them to try again: many more people are now familiar with e-mail, and they'll probably find more "takers".)

In reviewing future ESL projects, we believe FIPSE should consider projects looking at reading improvement, alternative means of assessing ESL students' reading abilities, and more support for faculty development, because most ESL courses are taught by adjuncts who need support.

Also, FIPSE should keep in mind that whole language in ESL is definitely an emerging direction, and projects with a whole language focus should be given strong consideration.

Finally, we just want to say THANKS. The FIPSE funding guaranteed our project's success ("money talks"), and we will always appreciate the vote of confidence we received from the people reviewing our original proposal, from Mr. Donahue and other FIPSE staff members, and from the U. S. Government.

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Flier advertising Fluency First workshops

# Appendices

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Outside evaluator's report

SAMPLE PUBLICATIONS ABOUT PROJECT

THE "FLUENCY-FIRST IN ESL" PROJECT
City College of New York, ESL Department, 1993

"Fluency First in ESL" is a whole-language approach to ESL writing and reading which was instituted in the ESL Department of City College of New York in 1987 by Profs. Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly and Elizabeth Rorschach, and has now been adapted by the faculty as the official curriculum. Whole-language instruction builds on the strengths of each learner and integrates all the language "skills". It asks students and teachers to collaborate in the learning process, a collaboration that changes the roles teachers and students have traditionally played in the classroom, as well as classroom discourse.

The Fluency First approach reverses the usual sequence of grammar first, and immerses students in massive amounts of English. It requires students to become good composers and competent readers first; later, students attend to matters of correctness. In each of the first two courses in our three-course ESL sequence - ESL 10, 20 & 30 - students write "books" of 10,000 words or more, and read 1,000 pages of unabridged popular fiction and non-fiction.

In ESL 10, students must achieve fluency in writing. This means that their writing must be entirely comprehensible, logical, complete (i.e. telling the whole story), and interesting, with few errors of the type that impede comprehensibility (e.g. wrong word order, missing words). Instruction at this level focuses on developing students' ability to write/say what they wish without being blocked by an emphasis on correctness. At this level, students work on writing creatively, and do a great deal of expressive, narrative and descriptive writing. And reading 1,000 pages helps students to naturally acquire a great deal of knowledge about English.

In ESL 20, instruction focuses on developing students' clarity in English; that is, on their ability to make what they say/write clear for their listeners/readers. This means that their writing must be fluent, have good introductions and conclusions, accomplish its purpose (e.g. persuasive, informative), have no digressions, have reasonable paragraphs with logical connections between paragraphs, and demonstrate good control over syntax (e.g. few sentency boundary or verb errors, and no errors that impede meaning). And again, reading 1,000 pages improves their knowledge of English and their reading abilities.

In ESL 30, students read college-level academic texts and write in response to them, expanding their writing repertoire. They also focus on editing, especially for verb errors and syntactic errors. But as in ESL 10 and ESL 20, the focus is first on fluency and clarity, then correctness. And all three courses are run workshop-style, with most of the students' time spent in small groups discussing readings, sharing written pieces, and revising them.

An integral part of implementing this approach has been providing teachers with workshops on whole language. In 1990, we received a 3-year FIPSE grant to offer training to more teachers at CCNY and at other institutions, to conduct research on the approach, and to disseminate the Fluency First model. Our data indicate that over twice as many students are now succeeding, compared with semesters in the 80's before the approach was implemented, and that we have cut the course repetition rate in half. Both faculty and students are also much happier with the approach, claiming that students are learning far more than with other ESL approaches. And we are now training faculty at several colleges, high schools and elementary schools, and will continue to do so upon request. There is also now a Fluency-First branch of the TESL-L e-mail network. For more information, call (212) 650-6289/6291.



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# ACHIEVING FLUENCY IN ENGLISH

## A Whole-Language Book

**Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly**
*City College of the City University of New York*

KENDALL/HUNT PUBLISHING COMPANY
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# ACHIEVING CLARITY IN ENGLISH

## A Whole-Language Book

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## FLUENCY BEFORE CORRECTNESS: A WHOLE LANGUAGE EXPERIMENT IN COLLEGE ESL

*Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly*

### Introduction

College ESL students need to learn a great deal of English to succeed in college, but ESL classes often fail to provide them with sufficient range and depth in the language. The typical approach to ESL instruction has been to give uniformly paced grammar instruction, exercises to practice that grammar, and intensive work on short and unrelated reading and writing assignments with limited vocabulary exposure. Such an approach does little to augment students' knowledge or accelerate acquisition of fluency in the language. In addition, a whole class generally works at the same pace on the same material, even though they may vary greatly in knowledge of English, level of proficiency, and learning pace.

ESL students are anything but homogeneous. They come from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds and differ significantly in their academic preparation, vocabulary, syntax, types of discourse, and reading and writing abilities. Some have learned English from studying grammar; others have acquired it without instruction through interaction with native speakers. In addition, ESL students vary in critical thinking abilities, levels of maturity, available time for study, motivation, and experiences and knowledge. Given these variables, a grammar intensive approach—too easy for some, or too difficult for others—is often a waste of time and energy. Individualization is needed.

Students also need far more second language competence than they typically acquire in classrooms, competence sufficient to enable them to keep up with native speakers of English in college courses. To promote language acquisition, we must provide learning opportunities akin to those of fir

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language acquisition. A whole language approach is essential. Whole language activities integrate all the language skills, do not fragment the language, are meaning driven, learner-centered, not intimidating, and allow all students to progress to their full capabilities.

A whole-language approach also encourages the development of learning strategies typically used by successful second language learners. Oxford and Crookall (1989) describe some of these strategies: taking an active approach to learning, self monitoring, making guesses, having a strong drive to communicate, making sustained searches for meaning, and using the language as a medium of thought. In a whole language approach, students employ these strategies repeatedly.

The research on language and literacy shows in general that when people learn to write with enthusiasm and confidence, to see themselves as composers in charge of their own writing, to interact with and help peers, to read extensively and become engrossed in the process, and to talk about their reading and writing, they advance far beyond peers learning in more traditional ways.† Such activities are the heart of whole language learning

† *Current research and theory in various disciplines lend support to a whole language approach. For second language learners, collaborative learning seems to increase language use by increasing comprehensible input. It also creates positive student attitudes toward learning because it is non-threatening, non-competitive, and enhances the social aspects of learning. For further reading in collaborative learning and student control, see Bruffee (1984), Smith (1988), and Cummins (1989).*

*Research into ESL literacy also supports a fluency-first approach. Edelsky (1986), Goodman, Goodman, and Flores (1979), Hudelson (1984, 1989), Kreeft, Shuy, Staton, Reed, & Morroy (1984), Lindfors (1987), Rigg and Enright (1986), and Urzua (1987) have all concluded that children learn ESL (oral and written skills) when language is used extensively for real purposes and they work for fluency and clarity before correctness. For similar support on first language literacy, see Holdaway (1979), Graves (1983), Harste, Burke, and Woodward (1984), and Smith, (1988) on children's literacy development; Branscombe (1987) and Atwell (1988) on adolescents; Bartholomae and Petrosky (1986) on college basic writing students.*

*At the adult level, Mangelsdorf (1989) shows how writing and speaking enrich second language acquisition in her college ESL class. Long and Porter (1985) describe how tasks requiring exchanges of information among students lead to adjustments that promote second language acquisition. Zamel (1985) describes how teachers' responses to ESL students' writing, when dialogic and concerned with communication of meaning rather than correctness of form, help students become more effective composers. Krashen (1989), Devine, (1988), and others agree that reading in a second language promotes acquisition of the second language.*



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This article describes a whole language approach that provides ESL students with augmented, accelerated, and individualized learning opportunities, helping them gain the fluency they need to succeed in college.

## Initiating a Whole-Language Approach

In the fall of 1986, a colleague and I began using a whole language approach in our ESL writing/reading courses. Our students learned English by reading and writing extensively, interacting with peers, and focusing on fluency and clarity before correctness. Based on informal comparisons, at the end of the semester our students showed greater progress in development of ideas, fluency, and longer, more interesting pieces than their peers in other classes.

In the following year, we invited a number of adjunct faculty to apply the whole-language approach in ESL 10, the first of our sequence of three reading/writing courses. Before the semester began, we trained a group of ten adjuncts in how to help students generate writing through free-writing, process writing, reading to acquire fluency, and group learning techniques. We developed a curriculum and established a sequence of priorities in writing development using the Mayher model (Mayher, Lester, & Pradl, 1983): Students should become fluent and then clear writers before becoming overly concerned with correctness. We applied the same goals for reading. Our goals in ESL 10, 20 and 30 became, respectively, fluency, clarity and correctness.

## ESL 10 Goal: Fluency

ESL 10, which meets nine hours a week, is a course for students with some knowledge of English but low-level writing and reading abilities. For ESL 10, we define fluency as the ability to read popular fiction with almost total comprehension and to write comprehensibly, though probably not correctly. We refined that definition of fluent writing to include the following criteria: no major gaps in meaning or content; logically related sentences and paragraphs; no major consistent syntactic problems of the kind that cloud meaning (missing subject pronouns, wrong word order, few/no tense indicators); and comprehensible spelling and handwriting. Students would develop fluency by completing a large quantity of work, reading and writing unadapted books rather than ones based on a grammar sequence.

In emphasizing fluency, we hoped to enable students to develop their second language abilities in ways similar to those in which they had acquired their first language with meaning as the driving force in communication. We provided abundant opportunities for real interaction and learning through discovery and inquiry. We hoped students would become so facile at expressive, narrative, and descriptive writing, as well as reading for pleasure that they could then move easily into academic courses.

## Activities

ESL 10 students read four best-sellers totaling a thousand pages and wrote responses to them in their double-entry journals, copying parts that they liked on the left hand side of the page and reactions on the right. They used these journal notes as a springboard for small in-class group discussions. Copying gave them practice in writing English; choosing important parts and writing reactions helped them to enter into and become engaged in the text emotionally and intellectually.

Some of the books they read were Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*, B. B. Hiller's *The Karate Kid*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*, Louis Fischer's *Gandhi*, Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, Daphne DuMaurier's *Rebecca*, Russell Baker's *Growing Up*, and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Teachers showed students the movie productions of these books in class.

Students read ten pages a night, seven nights a week. Teachers read to students in class at first to give them a sense of chunking, or reading in thought groups. Students also did timed readings in class, striving to read for meaning and to tolerate temporary confusion.

At first the students were unable to complete reading assignments, but after a few weeks, reading became more automatic and many were reading ahead because the books were very interesting to them. As students read more and discussed readings in small groups in class, their discussions became livelier and more detailed, and their double-entry journal notes improved; they asked relevant questions, selected more important parts of the text to comment on and drew analogies from their own experiences.

The ESL 10 students also worked on a ten thousand word writing project over the semester. Teachers helped them to decide on a focus for their projects by brainstorming, discussing projects in small groups, and freewriting in class. Once students had chosen a focus, they developed the project by writing separate chapters or short stories, producing 750 words each week. Some students wrote vignettes about their lives or interviewed family members about family history. Others wrote about political strife, wars and other traumas they had lived through in their countries before coming to the U.S. Some wrote novels: romances, mysteries and adventures. Teachers helped students to find examples and utilize techniques pertinent to each of these types of writing.

Each week, after writing a first draft of a chapter, the students read their work to partners. They told each other what they liked in a piece, what confused them, where they needed more information, and where/if there were gaps. Students revised their first drafts until they were ready to have the teacher look at them. Teachers read them and gave written feedback on completeness, logic, intelligibility, and effectiveness, after which students prepared final drafts. Significantly, teachers did not correct these pieces. The 10,000-word requirement often resulted in twice as many words because of revisions and extra material added. Each day students also freewrote in journals for ten minutes without stopping. This helped them generate and explore ideas, as well as to develop speed, automaticity, and confidence.

## Classroom Dynamics

During the course, the teachers neither taught formal grammar nor worked on the mechanics of writing. They ran the classes as writing/reading workshops where students wrote, read, and talked with peers and with the teacher. Teachers gave demonstrations or mini-lessons on editing, revising, effective paragraphs, conventions of writing, genre characteristics, and errors that could interfere with comprehensibility. They conferred with students regularly on their written work and checked their reading journals. Students typically spent half the class time discussing the reading they had done, working from their double entry journals. They spent the other half freewriting, conferring with peers and teacher, revising and rewriting.

## Results

Initially both teachers and students seemed uncomfortable with the classroom activities: so much freedom for students and so little of the customary teacher-centered activity. But eventually, students grew comfortable and took charge of their own learning. Teachers noted a markedly higher level of student engagement in class compared with former classes.

At first students and teachers worried about whether learning was occurring. But after about a month, they both expressed amazement that they had read and written so much, increased their reading speed and comprehension, and become more facile and confident as writers. Teachers expressed delight with the quality of their students' writing.

Teachers reported that most students were writing and reading more fluently, effectively, and correctly than students in the previous ESL 10



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urses, which emphasized correctness in writing. Many students claimed to joy reading and writing in English and to like Americans more as a result understanding them better through the novels they had read. About ninety cent passed ESL 10 based on holistic readings by pairs of faculty using e criteria for fluency (see p. 44). With enthusiasm, we extended the proach into ESL 20.

## SL 20 Goal: Clarity

We defined clarity, the new goal for ESL 20, as the ability to write gical and complete expository material. Students' pieces had to have a clear im focus, logically connected ideas and paragraphs, sufficient support for im ideas, no gaps or unnecessary material, and effective introductions and nclusions. ESL 20 students wrote in several genres from letters to a term per.

Students had to bridge the gap from reading fiction and writing in scriptive and narrative modes to writing and reading for academic purposes. hey would read to learn, as opposed to reading for pleasure. And their iting now would have to include analyses, summaries, syntheses, and other aterial requiring more critical thinking. To begin working toward clarity, udents picked up where they had left off in ESL 10.

### ctivities

We required a thousand pages of reading and a 10,000 word writing oject, as well as double-entry journal writing in response to the reading. o begin ESL 20, students read two historical novels about the U.S., and rote about them in double-entry journals. We chose works like John teinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, The *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and Studs erkel's *Working*. Students discussed the books in small groups, referring to eir journal notes and touching on major issues, events and people in merican history and American culture. This process helped them to choose topic for the 10,000 word writing project to be done over the semester.

Initially students wrote a position paper stating why they chose the pic, what they already knew about it, and what they hoped to learn. In me classes, students drafted the position paper in class so that they could rite this rather ominous sounding part of their project in a set time period d feel less intimidated by it. As in ESL 10, students read this first draft to peer for feedback. The writers then revised the position papers and gave em to the teacher for more feedback. Students' final revisions had to meet e criteria for clarity.

Students interested in the topic of racism chose books like Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Juan Williams' *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965*, or William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. To learn about World War II, students read books like William Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* or Martin Blumenson's *Patton: The Man Behind the Legend*. Students also chose topics such as ecology, the economy, the media, war, politics, societal ethics, government, the space program, or culture shock.

In addition to writing required summaries of their chosen books, students also wrote three point-of-view pieces as if they were actually involved in the topic. For example, they could make up a letter Martin Luther King might have written, a diary entry of an astronaut, a conversation between two historical figures, or a speech that a president might have given. Students especially enjoyed writing dialogues with a partner, each assuming the role of some historical figure.

Students then interviewed a person with expertise on their term topic: college professors, news reporters, authors, museum personnel, doctors, librarians, or people who lived through an event related to the topic—crime victims, police, homeless people, and war veterans. The students audio-taped the interviews, then summarized them, often including much of the exact dialogue. They wrote two letters—one requesting the interview and one thanking the interviewee—and a list of questions that would be asked during the interview.

Following the interview, students found three additional sources of information on their topic in the library in newspapers, magazines or journal articles, books, pamphlets, or video material. They summarized, wrote critical reactions, and revised. Students wrote a final term paper of at least two thousand words with an introduction, a summary of critical reactions, and questions and ideas for further research.

### Results

Although students had some difficulties, like doing library research for the first time and reading hundreds of pages on their own, gradually, as they became experts on topics and shared knowledge with others, the anxiety about tasks abated even though the writing tasks themselves became progressively more challenging. Students steadily improved in their ability to write clearly and to help others do so.

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## ESL 30 Goal: Correctness

We extended the fluency-clarity-correctness approach into ESL 30 in the fall of 1988. Because of the University's testing policy, the principal focus of this course is to prepare students to pass a writing test requiring them to write an effective agree-or-disagree essay with few or no serious errors in 50 minutes.

### Activities

In ESL 30 students read newspaper editorials to get a sense of how to voice opinions in English and argue about issues of current concern. The students wrote responses in their journals. Class usually began with freewriting or structured freewriting, writing ten minutes non-stop. Students debated issues with a partner before writing about them. These debates generated ideas and information on the topics.

Students chose most of their own topics, and revised their pieces until they met the criteria for passing the University's writing assessment test (WAT). As in ESL 10 and 20, students revised with peers first, and then with the teacher's help. When a piece was clear and persuasive enough to pass the WAT, it received a passing grade.

Once students had written several such pieces, they turned to concerns of editing. Teachers helped them identify their most frequently occurring errors and to look for these in their essays and in pieces they had written in ESL 10 and 20, which they kept in portfolios. Once students could correct a few error types and thus eliminated most of their errors, we helped them with other less frequent but serious error problems.

### ESL 30: Results

The average passing rate for ESL 30 students on the writing assessment test rose from thirty-five percent before the new approach was initiated to fifty-six percent. All else being equal, we attribute the gains made since 1987 partially to the fact that students entering ESL 30 were already improved writers, having developed fluency and clarity in the previous courses using the whole language approach.

ESL 30 teachers believe that teaching editing in the context of a student's own writing is more effective than teaching the whole class the same grammar and mechanics lessons and having them all do the same exercises. When students generate questions about grammar for their own purposes, they seem to learn more. Their writing isn't perfect at the end of ESL 30; it is just much better than it used to be with our old approach.

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ESL 30 has some glitches. Some students who are writing well at the end of ESL 20 do not progress in ESL 30 and a few even seem to regress under the pressures of preparing for the WAT, which will be judged by professors who think that correctness is the most important part of proficient writing. Because of the test, the course often focuses on one particular genre: opinion writing. A steady diet of this kind of writing often leads students to dislike writing. Thus ESL 30, which could be an expansion of the whole-language approach in ESL 10 and 20, turns into a narrowly focused test-preparation course. And it may not prepare students very well for writing in content courses.

## The Whole-Language Approach: Summary and Conclusions

Overall departmental passing rates on the reading assessment test have increased by almost a hundred percent and on the writing test by over sixty percent. This has happened with only about two-thirds of the ESL teachers using the new approach. In addition, far fewer students are now repeating ESL 10, 20, or 30, and external readers of the writing test (English Department faculty) now comment on what good writers the ESL students have become.

Teachers' assessments of students' progress have been consistently positive. Teachers using the approach say their students are making unprecedented progress in all language skills. Teachers and students report enjoying the classes more, learning more, and being more engaged and excited about learning than before. Teachers are newly energized not only by the progress they see, but by how much they are learning from the students. They report having more respect for students' knowledge and capabilities and agree that class time flies by now, where in the past it often dragged.

Students also report that they enjoy the course content, that they like the writing projects, the discussions, and individual attention. They are delighted with the progress they make but are skeptical about the lack of grammar instruction or use of ESL textbooks. This skepticism heightens in ESL 30 if they do not pass the writing test the first time around even though we can show them that more students are passing it than before and that they have made progress.

We attribute our overwhelming success to the massive amounts of spontaneous language used in the classroom, resulting in augmentation and acceleration of language development.

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## Final Remarks

Research and theory from many fields of inquiry affirm an approach to learning that is in sharp contrast with skill-building approaches. In his foreword to a recent volume describing promising research on ESL composing, Gaies (1989) sees the common thread of promising approaches to ESL writing to be student control. The control students exercise when composing is a powerful means for them to develop intellectually and to shape and refine their thinking as they discover and express meaning for an audience. Thus, Gaies writes, the goal of writing is ultimately social and personal empowerment, which needs the proper environment to develop. . . one that values students' experiences, gives tasks with real urgency, and fosters forms of interaction and collaboration that stimulate thinking, writing, and responding to writing (xii).

We have been striving toward such an environment at CCNY since the fall of 1987, and in the process we have also augmented, accelerated and individualized instruction. If our students could take content courses earlier in their college careers and not have to wait until they pass basic skills tests, they would accelerate their academic literacy skills even more. With these changes our students would be taking a step toward achieving their educational goals.

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Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly

# FLUENCY FIRST: REVERSING THE TRADITIONAL ESL SEQUENCE

ABSTRACT. *The author describes an ESL department's whole language approach to writing and reading, replacing its traditional grammar-based ESL instructional sequence. The new approach is enabling students to become fluent in writing and reading before having to produce grammatically correct pieces or to comprehend academic material. The research and theory on language acquisition, literacy development, and learning support a whole-language approach to ESL. And the quantitative and qualitative results of the first three years of using the approach affirm its superiority over traditional approaches to ESL reading and writing instruction.*

## INTRODUCTION

Too many English as a second language (ESL) students do not achieve their educational goals because they do not meet their colleges' writing standards. Those who evaluate ESL students' writing commonly cite the following problems: (1) lack of fluency or adequate control over the language, including inadequate vocabularies; (2) general lack of knowledge and the consequent inability to write effective pieces; and (3) errors in grammar and the mechanics of writing, despite the fact that most ESL students have had years of instruction in both. One way to address these problems is by reversing the traditional grammar-focused approach to ESL and

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instead using a whole-language approach, we help ESL students acquire greater fluency and knowledge and thus write more effective, and even more correct pieces.

Freeman and Freeman suggest that the following whole-language principles are important for second language (L2) learning in classrooms: language should be learner-centered; language is best learned when kept whole; language instruction should employ listening, speaking, reading, and writing; language in the classroom should be meaningful and functional; language is learned through social interaction; and language is learned when teachers have faith in learners. This article describes an experimental whole-language approach to ESL writing and reading in an open admissions urban institution serving primarily minority students.

## BACKGROUND

The ESL students in question typically have great trouble passing the university's required skills assessment tests (SKAT) in writing and reading, tests which students must pass before taking the bulk of their required courses, even the English Composition requirement. Prior to 1988, ESL students' average passing rate on the writing test had been only about thirty-five percent, and on the reading test, twenty percent.

The ESL faculty had historically taken a traditional instructional approach, stressing grammar and intensive reading and writing (a lot of work on relatively short readings and on writing paragraphs and essays). Yet pass rates had remained low. Then in the Fall of 1987, a group of faculty at The City College, CUNY began to use a whole-language approach to literacy. Since then students' writing and reading test scores have improved. We started implementing our approach in ESL 10, our first level ESL reading/writing course for students with a basic knowledge of English but weak reading and writing abilities. The ESL 10 students read several books, responded to them in writing in journals, and wrote 10,000-word, semester-long projects. We ran the classes workshop style, with students helping each other revise their own pieces, and understand the books they were reading. We used no ESL textbooks and did not teach grammar in those classes, but students made greater gains than we had ever seen in ESL 10. The approach was so successful that we extended it the following semester into our two upper-level ESL reading/writing courses, ESL 20 and 30. Since then, our SKAT reading test passing rate has doubled and the writing test passing rate has increased by sixty percent, even with only two-thirds of the faculty using the approach.



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## IMPLICATIONS FROM THEORY AND RESEARCH

*First language (L1) acquisition*

Implications for whole language approach are plentiful in the research literature. Educators can learn much about how lasting learning occurs from the research on L1 acquisition, not only because it is a language, but because L1 is something which everyone learns by the age of four or five, though it is extraordinarily complex. Macaulay summarizes how children learn L1: by being in the midst of abundant talk, by listening and experimenting with speaking, learning names of things, then phrases, and then the syntax they need to express themselves. They progress in L1 acquisition primarily through massive amounts of interaction with parents or more knowledgeable peers and they control their own L1 learning. Their knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, and pronunciation expands until they are fluent. The key to L1 acquisition is plentiful interaction with more knowledgeable others. The implication for L2 acquisition in classrooms is to provide similar language input and interaction, but due to time limits, in a far more condensed fashion.

*L2 acquisition*

Providing optimal input in the classroom in order to foster the development of L2 fluency does not mean teaching grammar. Krashen (1985) and McLaughlin argue from the research on L2 acquisition that L2 best develops in ways similar to L1: in contexts where the negotiation of meaning, and not the correctness of form, is the central motivating force, and where language exposure is real, extensive, and anxiety free. But in most language classrooms, language exposure is artificial (contrived, practiced, grammatically sequenced), limited, and anxiety arousing.

Krashen (1987) hypothesizes that the best classroom L2 acquisition will occur when the input provided to learners is comprehensible, interesting and/or relevant, not grammatically sequenced, provided in abundant quantity, and in such a way as to promote self-confidence and self-direction while arousing little or no anxiety. After examining popular L2 teaching methods and finding most of them wanting in such input, he concludes that pleasure reading and conversation have the greatest potential for meeting all the requirements for optimal L2 acquisition because they are made up of real input, and not the contrived type of input found in ESL textbooks and tapes. A whole-language approach includes much pleasure reading and real conversation.

Krashen also makes an important distinction between L2





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learning and L2 acquisition. L2 learning takes effort, like extensive memorization of rules and practice of forms learned. Then when people try to use these learned forms in real language situations, they often make mistakes and find it difficult to express themselves adequately and even to understand others. L1 is acquired naturalistically through interaction with others, with far less mental effort and with a greater payoff. L2 may be acquired in a similar manner in schools with a whole-language approach. This is true for both children and adults.

McLaughlin explains that early stages of language development involve the same cognitive strategies for adults and children. The difference is that adults have superior memory heuristics that enable longer retention and more facile discovery of meaning. Adults also have more extensive L1 experience, vocabulary, and conceptual knowledge that help them to process information more quickly. And if literate in L1, they have far less work to do in acquiring literacy in L2. They can also learn and apply rules of language more easily, although an overemphasis on correctness can also impede progress in L2 acquisition.

McLaughlin and others who have studied L2 acquisition describe learners' errors in terms of strategies. Thus what seems to be L1 interference or perhaps an inability to master L2 grammar is actually the result of the learner's strategies to discover irregularities and rules in L2. L2 adults make similar mistakes, regardless of what L1 they speak, and these represent unsuccessful attempts to discover L2 rules. They make simplification errors, transfer errors, or overgeneralization errors as they strive to make themselves understood, and they make them for as long a time as it takes for them to develop their competence in L2. This period of development is referred to as the interlanguage stage and needs to be supported by efforts to help the learner communicate intelligibly in L2 before requiring that s/he be correct. To learn to communicate intelligibly requires a great deal of exposure to L2 with the types of input and interaction L1 learners receive.

*L1 literacy development*

The research on the most successful learning of reading and writing in L1 also shows that when learners do abundant reading and writing, talk about both, enjoy both, exercise a good deal of control over both, and are not overly concerned about correctness, literacy development, like L1 acquisition, is enjoyable, successful, and almost effortless. And through an approach such as whole language, learners acquire a good deal of functional language knowledge that otherwise they would have to take great pains to



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learn: spelling, grammar, vocabulary, appreciation of literature, good composing skills, and good reading skills.

On the elementary level, Holdaway, Graves, Harste, and Smith, among others, have shown how children acquire the skills of literacy when they read and write extensively, talk about language and about what they read and write, have abundant time for independent reading and writing, receive constructive feedback on their writing, ask their own questions, formulate and test their own hypotheses, are not afraid of making mistakes, are encouraged to become serious authors, and are immersed in literate activities across the curriculum. They can control and direct many of these activities themselves.

Branscombe, Atwel, Bartholomae and Petrosky, and many others on the secondary and postsecondary levels report similar findings. It appears that students who read extensively and talk about their reading, who become fluent writers before having to focus on correctness (Mayher et al.), and who are writing to learn (Gere; Goswami) become more successful academic readers, writers, and learners.

*L2 literacy development*

As already indicated, research on L2 literacy development also points to the desirability of a whole-language approach, with an emphasis on integrative skills rather than grammar study, memorization, and repetitious exercises. According to Hudelson, language development researchers have concluded that people learn languages by actively participating in an ongoing process of figuring out how language works, and that learners must be in control of this process. Research evidence further suggests that the processes of L1 and L2 acquisition are more similar than different, which in the school setting means that L2 learners are in the process of creative construction of the new language. Errors are a natural part of this process as learners formulate and test hypotheses about the language. There are also significant individual differences in the rate of acquisition, thus a uniformly paced curriculum is of little effectiveness. L2 learners want to use the L2 and work hard to be included in the ongoing activities of the classroom. More knowledgeable others and peers offer important teacher functions in providing comprehensible input and motivation to help L2 learners continue learning English. This is true for both oral and written English (1–3).

Like native speakers, L2 writers creatively construct the written language, develop at their own pace, and control the process. Some will experiment and take risks in creating meaning in writing;



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others will use familiar patterns for a long time. Investigations have shown that given sufficient encouragement and opportunity, ESL writers will work hard to create meaning, even those without native-like control of English (20–21). ESL learners also construct meaning from print as they read, just as L1 readers do (Carrell et al.).

There have been several studies conducted and hypotheses made about the processes of L2 writing which are very similar to those regarding L1 writing. For example, Edelsky found that the quality of writing is much higher for unassigned topics than for assigned ones in ESL writing. Others have found that personal involvement with a piece also has a positive effect on its quality. Pieces on unassigned topics tend to be better developed and have a personal voice. This is particularly true when there is a real audience, when writers have a stake in the piece, and when it is purposeful. And Urzua found that in writing/reading workshops, as opposed to traditional instruction, L2 writers revise more, develop a personal voice, and become more aware of the power of language. She also found that conferencing influences revising positively.

Hudelson concludes from a review of the research on children's ESL writing that ESL learners, while still learning English, can write. Their texts have many features in common with L1 writers' texts, features indicating that they are making predictions about how the L2 works, and testing and revising their ideas. She recommends a variety of strategies for classrooms, including using diaries and journals to promote fluency in writing and utilizing personal narratives and writing workshop techniques to help learners become comfortable with writing on self-selected topics, and with drafting, sharing, and revising. She also suggests incorporating expressive, literary, and expository writing into meaningful content-area learning.

Likewise, Krashen (1985) recommends using subject matter in L2 as a vehicle of presentation and explanation, but without demands for premature production or full grammatical accuracy. He cites the evidence from the successful language immersion programs in Canada and elsewhere, where teachers incorporate language development into content-area instruction. And in their studies of adult L2 writing, Raimes, Zamel, and others have found that the L2 writing process must begin with abundant opportunities to generate ideas before students focus on editing. They and other researchers in ESL (Krashen 1987, Spolsky) also argue that direct grammar instruction does not generally improve L2 writing or even L2 acquisition. In fact, it probably impedes both processes.

As for L2 reading, Carrell's review of the research shows that L2 reading and L1 reading are currently understood in much the same



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way: as an active process in which the L2 reader is an active information processor who predicts meaning while sampling only parts of the text. In addition, everything in the reader's prior experience and knowledge plays a significant role in the process of L2 reading (Carrell and Eisterhold). Carrell further explains that L2 reading must involve both the predicting/sampling activities as well as bottom-up processing, or some decoding, to be efficient; thus reading experts now propose an interactive L2 reading model involving both types of processing. And Devine explains that research and experience have shown that reading is a vehicle not only for the development of L2 reading abilities, but for learning L2 as well. Krashen (1989) found that ESL students' vocabulary, writing, and spelling improve through extensive reading, another indication that using the language extensively and for real purposes helps one to acquire more of the language.

Learning theorists like Vygotsky, Britton, and Wells have stressed the interdependence of language and learning, and the fact that lasting learning, intellectual growth, and language are inextricably connected. This too suggests classroom learning contexts where learners learn the language and content through an abundance of language-mediated activities and projects over which they can exert considerable control.

## THE NEW ESL APPROACH AT CCNY

Borrowing the terms of Mayher et al., that the ideal sequence in the development of writing would stress fluency first, then clarity, and finally correctness, we made these the respective goals for our three ESL writing/reading courses: ESL 10, 20, and 30.

### *ESL 10*

We defined fluency as the ability to generate one's ideas in writing intelligibly and with relative ease, and to comprehend popular fiction with similar ease. To do this, students were given massive exposure to English. They read 1,000 pages of popular fiction, in books like Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, Daphne DuMaurier's *Rebecca*, Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, B. B. Hiller's *The Karate Kid*, Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*, and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. They also read autobiographical and biographical works like *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, Russell Baker's *Growing Up*, Louis Fischer's *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*, and William Gibson's *The Miracle Worker*. They had to read about 70 pages a week for homework, copy passages that struck them, and write responses to



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those passages in their double-entry journals. They then discussed their responses and questions in small groups in class.

The ESL 10 students also worked on a writing project that had to total 10,000 words by semester's end. Most wrote autobiographical pieces consisting of significant chapters or memories in their lives; some wrote family histories. Others wrote of political strife they had lived through and escaped from, or mysteries, love stories, science fiction, or magazines. Each week they drafted a new piece for their "books," as we called them, read them to their partners, and got help from them on making the pieces comprehensible, logical, and interesting. Teachers then gave more of the same kind of feedback for students to consider for final revisions.

Although, at the beginning, many students complained about the amount of work required and the lack of grammar lessons, after a few weeks both students and teachers expressed amazement at how much the students had progressed in such a short time. As students became more involved in their reading and in their writing projects, they also became more engaged in them, often reading beyond assigned pages and writing up to twice as much as required. By semester's end, most were reading and writing fluently and even more correctly than in the beginning, without having received any corrections or grammar instruction. The overall enthusiasm and trust generated by the approach led us to continue with it in ESL 10 and extend it into the second level, ESL 20.

*ESL 20*

The goal for ESL 20 became clarity, which we defined as the ability to write expository pieces with a clear focus, sufficient support for that focus, logical development of ideas, and effective introductions and conclusions. In ESL 20, students went from narrative and descriptive writing and reading to expository writing and reading, but not in one leap. We wanted to ease them into expository writing, and from reading for pleasure into academic reading, or reading to learn. They began by reading two bestsellers, historical fiction or nonfiction, having to do with the U.S.A., such as Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, William Styron's *Confessions of Nat Turner*, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and Studs Terkel's *Working*. As in ESL 10, they responded in writing in double-entry journals and discussed their readings in small groups.

They also wrote a 10,000-word, semester-long project on some aspect of America having to do with its people, history, culture, or problems. The project included letter writing, point-of-view writing, reading and writing about a best seller on the topic, interviewing an expert and reporting on that, library research, and a term paper.



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Students revised their pieces in a workshop setting, as in ESL 10. And again, by semester's end, most students were writing clearly enough to pass ESL 20.

*ESL 30*

Those teaching ESL 30, the course at the end of which students have to pass the university's writing exam, reported and continue to report, that the students coming out of ESL 20 are now much better writers and readers than those formerly entering ESL 30. Teachers say they now do not have to focus as much on helping their ESL 30 students to compose well, and can concentrate on students' remaining problems with grammar and the mechanics of the language (which are no greater or less than when we used a grammar curriculum) and on getting students ready for the test, which requires them to write a 350-word persuasive piece that is almost error-free in 50 minutes. Thus the two major goals of ESL 30 are correctness and preparation for the test.

In ESL 30, teachers who are committed to the whole-language approach require that students revise their pieces first to be sure they are completely clear, intelligible, and well-written before they focus on correcting them. Once they are sure students can write clear and effective persuasive pieces, they have them begin work on eliminating the largest percentage of their errors by choosing just a few of their most serious and most frequently occurring errors, and looking just for them when they edit. This eliminates the bulk of students' errors without the cognitive overburden of trying to correct every error.

To become strong in argumentative writing, students read newspaper and magazine articles and editorials, write in their journals in response to them, discuss their ideas in small groups, debate the issues both aloud and in silent written debates with partners, and build up a knowledge of current issues and principles involved in them, like civil rights, government policies, domestic and foreign problems, personal values and beliefs, and ethics. Students also freewrite frequently, and write a few essays each week which go through the same process as in ESL 10 and 20: peer review, revising, teacher response, more revising, until the essay is clear and correct enough to satisfy the criteria posed by the writing exam. In the process, students ask many questions in the context of their writing, and then write what they've learned on individualized study lists of spelling words, new vocabulary, useful facts, grammar points they need to focus on, mechanics issues, and style issues.

Some ESL 30 teachers also have students write real letters to newspapers, public agencies, government officials, businesses, and



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others to complain about an issue and to suggest solutions. We have found that this type of real writing is often the most effective. (For more specifics on classroom activities, materials, and techniques, see MacGowan-Gilhooly "Fluency Before Correctness: A Whole Language Experiment in College ESL." *College ESL* 1.1 (Spring 1991).

*Evaluation*

Students in ESL 10 and 20 are evaluated at the end of the semester through a timed essay exam with topics relevant to the semester-long projects they have done and the books they have read. But this exam is only one factor in their evaluation. They keep a portfolio with their beginning piece from the first day of the semester, their midterm exam, their final, and three pieces from their projects that they think are their best. The ESL 10 and 20 teachers read each others' students' exams and if necessary, pieces from students' portfolios, and recommend if the student should pass or repeat the course. Then the teacher bases the grade on the quality of the portfolio pieces, including consideration of the quantity of work completed. ESL 30 students are given the writing exam at the end of the course, and two readers other than the teacher, usually one from the ESL staff and one from the English department, evaluate the essays. Students who do not pass the exam must repeat ESL 30.

ESL 10, 20, and 30 classes utilizing the new approach have these commonalities: a workshop format, peer and teacher help with revisions, massive exposure to real language through extensive reading, writing, and speaking, absence of ESL textbooks, absence of sequenced grammar syllabi or uniform curricula, student control over much of their work, a portfolio system, and teachers helping individuals and small groups rather than leading the whole class.

We follow a uniform approach, or philosophy, but not a static method. Indeed, we are enabled to offer a curriculum that is anything but static. Materials and activities change with new insights; teachers regularly exchange ideas to help students increase their learning; students learn from their interests and work from their strengths; there is a great deal of life in the classroom, as students share their knowledge and expertise with others; and the approach helps students utilize better learning strategies and become more responsible for their own learning.

## QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

The quantitative results we have so far have reassured us and the



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students that we are headed in the right direction. The number of students taking courses using the fluency-first approach is approximately 3,000 so far; with 250 in the Fall of 1987 and roughly 600 each semester from Spring 1988 through Spring 1990. Even though a few teachers of ESL 10 and 20 have stuck to a traditional curriculum, most have used the new approach, and overall, ESL students' reading scores since 1987 have almost doubled. We believe that this rate could be even higher if all were using the approach, and if the test were given after ESL 30 or even later; currently it is given after ESL 21, a reading course students take concurrently with ESL 20.

The writing test pass rate has gone from thirty-five percent to fifty-six percent, which is about the average for native speakers, and there is a much lower course repetition rate for ESL 10 and 20. In addition, more students who start on the ESL 10 level are passing the test. Prior to Fall 1987, only twenty percent of those students eventually passed the SKAT. And if the SKAT test were given after some content courses instead of after ESL 30, probably even more students would pass it. But we all know that numbers do not tell the whole story.

## QUALITATIVE RESULTS

The most compelling evidence of the success of the approach has been qualitative, with uniformly enthusiastic feedback from teachers, almost universally positive feedback from students, and concrete evidence of improvement in students' written work and reading abilities. On a survey conducted at the end of the second semester in which the new approach was being piloted, teachers reported unprecedented improvement in students' control of English, with growth in fluency occurring very fast. Students typically doubled their production by the fourth week of class. Teachers also reported greater clarity in the way students presented ideas, more daring in their use of new vocabulary, greater ability to write interesting pieces, better reading comprehension and speed, greater enjoyment of reading than in previous ESL courses, and better discussions of readings with students providing insights from their own lives and world views.

Many reported that students' essays had more depth and richness, more fluency, and better grammar, and that all the students progressed more in these courses than in previous ones. Students also showed more growth in the affective domain, specifically more confidence, better ability to work with groups, and more tolerance for divergent views. And cognitively, they were



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better at analytical thinking, and showed much greater intellectual curiosity. Further, the students who did the most work progressed the most, and students generally were more serious, concentrated, self reliant, and open to others than in previous semesters when the approach was traditional.

Teachers reported a higher degree of engagement, attention, and time on task. Students were more willing to write and less afraid of it. They also did so much reading and discussion that it gave them a shared experience in which everyone seemed to have an equal footing; this was empowering to students who were less skilled in English. And teachers felt that students gained confidence in themselves as writers and saw themselves as serious writers in this approach; traditional approaches seemed to inhibit experimentation and exaggerate the importance of errors. Before the course, students could not apply rules they had learned to their writing; but after it, it seemed they could. Yet the only grammar instruction they had had was in the context of questions about their own writing as they revised it.

When asked what they would change about the approach, teachers said they needed more time for in-class individual conferences, more lab support in the way of tutors, better techniques for getting the groups to be more independent, and greater evidence that students are learning grammar and mechanics in ESL 10 and 20, even though they can see fewer mistakes as students progress through the courses. Teachers also wanted to do less talking and interfering with students' discussions and their written pieces, because such intervention appeared to lessen students' involvement and creativity. Many ended up not even looking at students' first or second drafts, but responding to the third draft after the student had worked with a peer. However, at that point, teachers said they wanted to give even more helpful responses than they were giving. And they wanted to work more on a one-to-one basis than they had been able to do.

The majority of students believed that they had improved considerably because they could write such long pieces and read so much in such a short time, compared with work done in former courses. They felt the organization of their writing had improved, and felt they had greater confidence and control when writing and that they were surprised by how much they could write. They also felt they were better able to develop ideas and liked working on the self-selected writing projects the best. They expressed pride in having read several real novels in English, rather than ones abridged for ESL students, but they felt less sure about their correctness in writing. Many students also said that the course, although focusing



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on reading and writing, had improved their speaking as well. And a few also commented that their ways of thinking have changed, that they felt Americanized because of the course work and that they liked that feeling.

Students said they wanted more grammar, even though they acknowledged greater growth in this ESL approach than in previous courses in which grammar had received major stress. They also wanted more practice for the final exam. And many students said that the writing demands of the double-entry journals were too great. They also said they were teaching each other too much and maybe the teacher should be teaching them more. In other words, despite their recognition of and satisfaction with their own growth, years of traditional instruction limited their confidence in the approach.

## ONGOING RESEARCH

The City College has received a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) to conduct further research on the approach, to train teachers in the theory and techniques used, and to disseminate project findings. The first item on our research agenda is to demonstrate how students' writing improves over time using a whole-language, fluency-first approach, compared with how it develops using a grammar-based approach. And we have many questions to answer, such as whether the pressure to pass the test adversely affects students' development in writing in ESL 30, and how well our students do in later required courses. We also want to experiment with students taking greater control and responsibility in the courses, and with other course themes, activities, projects, and readings.

But what we have already learned is that our students now are acquiring fluency in English along with what Mayher et al. call fluency in the written language, and that this latter fluency is the basis for their becoming competent readers and writers, enough to become successful members of the academy. Thus there are decided implications for such an approach in teaching native speakers of English as well.

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# STRATEGIES

A PUBLICATION IN SUPPORT OF INNOVATIVE INSTRUCTION

June 1991 • Volume 1 Number 2 — City College • City University of New York


## FROM THE EDITORS

*Hope Hartman and Lisa Livingston*

This newsletter includes a brief survey intended to help us identify CCNY faculty interests, current teaching practices and reactions to a variety of topics so we can plan the future of **STRATEGIES**. Our goal is to provide an informative and motivational resource which stimulates faculty to try new instructional approaches. This survey will provide an important empirical base for the development of specific articles for the newsletter.

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## NEW FIPSE-FUNDED ESL FACULTY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT


*Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly and Elizabeth Rorschach*
*ESL Department, City College*


The ESL Department has received a three-year grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) to conduct research and work with adjunct and full-time faculty on a new curriculum that emphasizes developing fluency in writing before focusing on correctness.

In the past, second language instruction has focused at the beginning level on helping the students produce short, accurate texts, saving extensive reading and writing for more advanced levels. Our new curriculum reverses this order, asking students to write 50-page (10,000-word) projects and to read four novels at the beginning level. For some of our students, this extensive reading and writing is the first they have done anywhere, in any language.

The project is called "Fluency First in ESL". In its first year it has two components - faculty education and research - to help us institute and study the effects of our new curriculum. We will describe the first component here.

Since September 1990, ESL faculty members have been working together to learn more about the theories on which the new curriculum is based and to discuss instructional methodologies. Participating teachers attend several workshops during each semester, where they discuss such topics as: responding to and evaluating students' texts, organizing student-centered classrooms, using reading and learning logs to help the students develop responses to assigned readings, and various activities that help students generate ideas and revise or edit their texts.

At these workshops, the faculty write, think about their own writing and learning processes, discuss events from their own classrooms, and share ideas about how to improve student learning (i.e., they participate in the kinds of activities they'll be asking their students to do) and begin to see the value of these new methods. They also keep teaching logs which include records of their problems, successes, speculations about why some activities go well while others don't, and questions for the project directors to address.

Participating faculty also meet periodically with the project directors on an individual basis, after the directors have observed their classes. They discuss experiments and changes in their teaching. Some find it challenging to move away from center stage to give students more control over their learning processes.

The teachers, who have been attending workshops since the end of August 1990, have responded to the project with enthusiasm. For some, the workshops are opportunities to meet other teachers, talk about teaching and learning - talk that every teacher knows is necessary - but so few are able to find time for. Others have said that working with the project has been the equivalent of getting a graduate degree. Thinking about their teaching, talking with colleagues, and reading handouts distributed by the project directors has provided such a wealth of information about how to teach and teach better that they don't want to stop.




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prompts than they did on the current WAT prompt. However, these findings must be interpreted with caution. Students' performance on the experimental prompts may have been influenced by their prior experience with the current WAT prompt, a variable that this study could not control.

The majority of the faculty who participated in both phases of this research project recommended that the CUNY Writing Task Force standardize the format of the current WAT prompt by using the words "some people think that" to introduce the prompt's assertion and by including two points of view about the assertion. In this study, the prompt that included two points of view elicited responses that received mean holistic quality scores and mean pass rates similar to those elicited by the current WAT prompt (which states only a single point of view).

Finally, the participants in this study agreed that if any changes are going to be made in the current WAT prompt, the effects of these changes should be monitored in follow-up longitudinal studies. We cannot assume that a change in the WAT prompt (such as another task, a different task, or more time) will optimize students' performance. Rigorous research is necessary to determine whether changes help or hinder students.

The research project described in the IRC monograph demonstrates the professionalism of CUNY's composition and ESL teachers. The 157 teachers who participated in the study are clearly knowledgeable about recent theories and research on writing. Their lucid analyses, summarized in the report, provide the profession with important insights into appropriate tasks for eliciting and evaluating writing competence. For a copy of the research report, write to the Instructional Resource Center after April 1.

▼ ▲ ▼

## Reflections on "Fluency First" Teacher Training Seminars, 1991-92

*Mary Bernardez*, Queensborough Community College

I have recently had the pleasure of participating in the "Fluency First" Training/Research Seminars at City College, a project funded by a FIPSE grant to Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly and Elizabeth Rorschach. In order to develop new college curriculum in ESL instruction, Professors MacGowan-Gilhooly and Rorschach developed the Fluency First curriculum, based on the theory of whole language. When I applied to the program, I was very much interested in a whole language approach to teaching ESL composition since I had earlier read the reactions of teachers who had participated in an experiment using whole language to teach reading. Reading about their experiments with non-ESL readers, I began to think about the implications for college ESL instruction. Therefore, it was with much interest and enthusiasm that I became a participating teacher.

Reflecting on my involvement in this project, I must say that my expectations have been far exceeded. I have enjoyed and learned through an open and continuing dialogue with other participants and the skillful guidance of the trainer, Elizabeth Rorschach. As a result of experimenting with the techniques to achieve a whole language approach to teaching Basic and ESL composition, I have undergone pedagogical changes which I feel have made me a more effective writing teacher. At this time, I would like to share my thoughts about the project, the implementation of the techniques of whole language instruction, and the result of my efforts as reflected in my classroom observations of student learning.

Basically, the Fluency First curriculum in ESL instruction is modeled on the fluency, clarity, correctness sequence suggested by Mayher, Lester and Pradl in *Learning to Write/Writing to Learn.* Gilhooly and Rorschach define *fluency* as the ability to describe, narrate and otherwise express oneself in writing with relative ease. The writer is not so much concerned with grammar, and his writing is comprehensible. *Clarity* is the ability to write expository pieces that are clear, well developed, complete and logically organized. The writer establishes a focus and demonstrates an awareness of reader, of organization, of appropriate details. *Correctness* is the ability to write expressively and expositorily with a minimum (or no) grammatical or mechanical errors (e.g.) word



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order, tense usage, indecipherable spelling, etc. This three-level paradigm applies to sequence of programs, courses, and papers.

A useful vehicle to achieving fluency, of course, is freewriting, which provides students with the opportunity to produce a large quantity of writing that functions as a source of ideas or insights that can later be developed, but more importantly as a tool for learning. During our workshops and at home, we were often required to respond to teaching concerns in freewriting. As I responded to these assignments, I experienced how enlightening the process of writing is in reflecting on and clarifying thoughts and ideas about important issues. At the April/92 CUNY ESL Conference, John Mayher, plenary speaker, said that English is an academic process—reconstructing knowledge and conveying meaning. Freewriting is a useful strategy learners can apply across disciplines to reflect on what they have learned, focusing on important concepts rather than on the form and structure of formal writing—which can be organized for greater clarity and correctness later.

As participating teachers, we were required to keep a teaching log in which we recorded our classroom activities, observation of student reaction to experimental techniques, questions we had, etc. As we shared these teaching journals during our seminars, it became quite clear that the process of reflecting on what went on in the classroom was indeed enlightening. The techniques we were learning to implement, although primarily designed for ESL student writers, could also be successfully applied to non-ESL composition classes. It is important to note that everything we did in our workshops was implemented in the classroom. We discussed our teaching goals and objectives. Of primary importance to me were two basic concerns: to remove the anxiety from writing, and to transfer the responsibility for learning to the student.

Students write best when they write about topics they really care about. Collaborative learning encourages students to share their writing in order to discover ideas for topics. One technique that yields positive results is point of view writing, which works particularly well for poetry. However, students can also be asked to assume the role of one of the characters in a short story like Ann Petry's "Like a Winding Sheet." (I use the Gillespie, Singleton text, *Across Cultures.*) After students list the characters and identify the relationships, they can explore the relationships through freewriting, with an option of developing this into a longer text at a later date. Students can be required to keep a reading journal, in which they respond to assigned readings by asking questions, raising points of interest or responding to quotations, and interpretating passages. They can also list new vocabulary. Student's written responses can then be evaluated in group discussion before being presented to the class. These student reading journals often generate ideas for writing topics. Students essays are another source of ideas for longer term papers. I have found that as a result of students creating their own topics, their essays are intelligent, thoughtful, and interesting.

Another issue of concern to teachers is how to respond to student writing to guide students toward revision. My own procedure is first to point out the parts of the paper I really like. I then proceed to write questions or offer suggestions. Once the student has re-shaped his writing to convey his ideas more clearly, I can begin to address the problems of mechanics, grammar, and syntax. A useful method to improve clarity is to ask students to copy the unclear sentence in a double entry journal which has been divided into two columns, on the other side of which they can rewrite the sentence more clearly. This may require several attempts, but my ESL students who often have problems with syntax tell me they find this method helpful. My criteria for grading is largely based on content. I consider how much thought the student has given to his topic, how clearly he has been able to express his ideas, and finally the level of complexity of those ideas.

Another important issue addressed during our seminars is the ESL student's difficulty answering questions in class. Allowing students time to write their answers first would, it was agreed, facilitate discussion and thus achieve the goal of full stu-


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dent participation. Everyone writes and everyone expresses an opinion. Writing in class to prepare for discussion is a most efficient use of class time.

One of my goals when I began to participate in the FIPSE project was to provide a more learner-centered classroom environment for my students. I feel I have accomplished that. My students decide on the issues for class discussion, create their own topics for writing, actively participate in evaluating their own as well as a partner's writing and seeking instruction and information as the needs arise. I, in turn, am spending much more time reflecting on and responding to student writing. Their written work provides a vehicle for ongoing communication between audience and writer as well as an ideal opportunity for instruction at the point of need.

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## Hunter Institute Is Awarded FIPSE Grant

*Anthea Tillyer,* International English Language Institute, Hunter College

The Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) recently awarded a three-year grant to the Hunter College International English Language Institute to fund the continued development of the TESL-L electronic network for ESL/EFL professionals. TESL-L (Teachers of English as a Second Language Electronic List) started in May 1991 as a small electronic discussion and support group for CUNY ESL teachers, the brain-child of teachers at the Hunter Institute. The network has grown so rapidly that it now lists over a thousand members in 44 countries and reaches roughly 1500 additional teachers through redistribution networks at other universities throughout the world. Membership is increasing at the rate of 3.5 new members a day.

Teachers on the network communicate with their colleagues using the speed and power of electronic mail (e-mail). Discussions focus on any question or suggestion that a teacher might "post" to the group. Members are free to introduce any topic that interests them. They can get instant responses to requests for references or suggestions for books, techniques, jobs, classroom dilemmas—even requests for rides to professional conferences. The network also archives the program books of national ESL professional conferences, so that both participants and non-participants can access them electronically.

The grant will enable its recipients to continue several projects. First, it will develop an online database of ESL materials to be stored on CUNYVM, the CUNY University Computing Center machine that supports TESL-L. Second, it will help develop branches of TESL-L . (TESL-L now has 7 branches, covering topics such as intercultural communication, employment issues, whole language, computer-assisted language learning, etc.). Finally, it will disseminate information about TESL-L and train teachers in how to use electronic mail and TESL-L.

To join TESL-L, you need to get an electronic mail user ID number. This "address" will be good for all electronic communications, not just TESL-L. Your institutional Academic Computing Services Department will provide you with the number. You can also get a "commercial" user ID number through services like MCImail, GEnie, Telnet, Compuserve, and a variety of similar services, which can link up with TESL-L.

To subscribe to TESL-L, you send an e-mail message to listserv@cunyvm consisting of the line "subscribe TESL-L <first name> <last name>" (quotes not included). If Joe Smith wished to subscribe to TESL-L, for example, the line would read, "subscribe TESL-L Joe Smith." If you have any problems, you can send a message by e-mail to Anthea Tillyer (abthc@cunyvm) or by snail mail to Anthea Tillyer, International English Language Institute, Hunter College, 695 Park Avenue. New York, New York 10021 (Telephone: 212/772-4290).

The directors of the TESL-L project are Allen Ascher, Acting Director of the Hunter International English Language Institute, and Anthea Tillyer, who teaches at the Institute and founded TESL-L.

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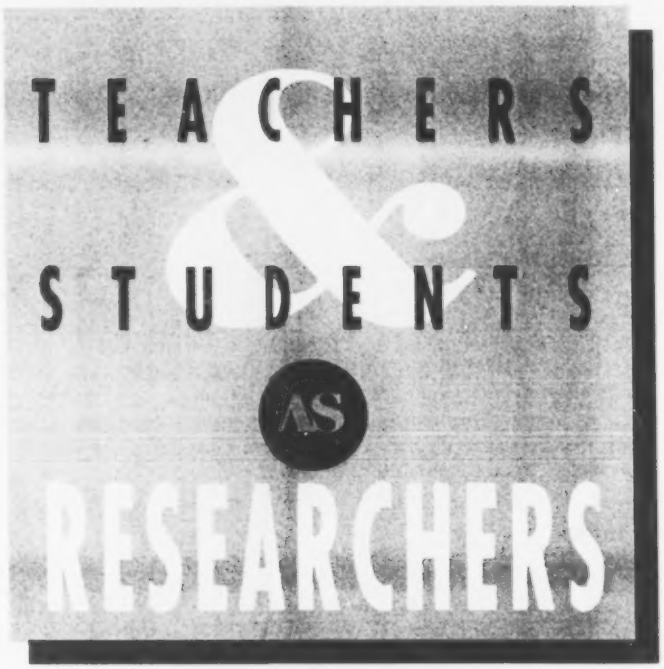
# Improving Learning in ESL through Research




## Papers from the 1991 CUNY ESL Council Conference

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# TEACHERS AND STUDENTS AS RESEARCHERS

## Improving Learning in ESL Through Research

**Papers from the 1991**
**CUNY ESL Council Conference**


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The City College
Conference Chair

Associate Editors

*Elizabeth Rorschach*
The City College

*Len Fox*
Brooklyn College


The 1991 CUNY ESL Council Conference was dedicated to the memory of Mel Baron, esteemed colleague and friend.
July, 1992


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## THE CUNY ESL COUNCIL

The CUNY ESL Council was organized in 1974 by coordinators of ESL programs at The City University of New York to promote communication among the various units of the University and represent the interests of ESL faculty and students to College and University administration. It serves as a forum for ESL faculty to discuss programs and policies of member units. The Council holds an annual conference on issues, theory, research, and practice related to ESL instruction. Membership is open to full-time and part-time CUNY faculty interested in the teaching of English as a second language, and to other interested parties.

## THE INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

The Instructional Resource Center of The Office of Academic Affairs of The City University of New York (CUNY) publishes material relating to CUNY's freshman year. These include the IRC's own reports and studies, as well as writings of individuals and groups contributing to the dialogue about first-year studies at CUNY.

The Center is a division of CUNY's Office of Academic Affairs and is under the aegis of the University Dean for Academic Programs. Its projects are directed by Virginia B. Slaughter.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

about the CUNY ESL Council, or for a list/order form of Instructional Resource Center publications, please write to The Instructional Resource Center, Office of Academic Affairs, The City University of New York, 535 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10021.

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# PREFACE

Research for the purpose of improving learning is, as it should be, part of our everyday work as teachers. Mostly, we do it informally in our classrooms and later, alone, we do it as we look at students' work, reflect on classroom events, and modify what we are doing and asking our students to do, in this way seeking to improve learning. We also read others' research, take what we can from that to help our students to achieve greater learning, and share ideas and successes with colleagues.

But when we set about looking at what's happening in our classes and in our students' work in a more formal way, gathering data, analyzing it, and talking about it with colleagues to make sense of it, often we see and learn much more. And even though what we learn is about a certain set of students with a certain teacher in a certain curriculum, or what some call "local knowledge," there are often powerful implications from our findings for learning in other classrooms.

This conference, then, was about improving learning through classroom-based research, and about sharing the ways of improving learning based on our research. Susan Lytle's opening plenary address gave us a framework for understanding the importance and power of classroom-based research, and the various presenters enriched our knowledge about learning in ESL classrooms. The afternoon plenary session, a panel of teacher-researchers experimenting with whole language at CCNY, gave us a sense of how collaboration in research on learning enriches our knowledge base even more.

The CUNY ESL Council is grateful to The City College of New York for co-sponsoring this year's conference, and to Jack Gantzer, 1990-91 President of the CUNY ESL Council, for overseeing its organization. Our gratitude also goes to Nora Eisenberg, Virginia Slaughter, and the Instructional Resource Center for editorial consultation, and to Dean Harvey Wiener, Acting University Dean for Academic Affairs and Director of the Instructional Resource Center, for his continued support of the efforts of the CUNY ESL Council, including the publication of these proceedings.

Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly, *Editor*
Conference Chair

***EXCERPTS FROM PLENARY ADDRESS:***

# ESL TEACHERS AND STUDENTS AS RESEARCHERS: BUILDING COMMUNITIES FOR INQUIRY


## Susan Lytle, University of Pennsylvania


Susan Lytle began by mentioning a number of teacher-researchers who work with ESL learners in different contexts, briefly describing their research as "systematic and intentional inquiry about some aspect of teaching, learning, and/or schooling," carried out in reference to their own practice: "Linda Dessner, who teaches in a private college in Philadelphia, has studied the types of comments she has made on students' papers and their effect on students' revision of their writing. Ruth Ray, at Wayne State University, wanted to understand why large numbers of non-native English speakers were failing the English proficiency exam, so she followed the progress of a number of non-native speakers through their writing courses. Penny Starr, of the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, looked at the composing processes of deaf primary school children. Smokey Wilson, at a community college in Oakland California, has been studying the ways that spoken and written language interweave and overlap, including 'the teacher's power to promote written literacy through talk.' Beth Winningham, ESL instructor at an L.A. high school, asked her ESL students to do non-ESL content courses such as math, social studies, and science. Elsa Auerbach and others have studied the effects of 'participatory curriculum development' in programs for adult literacy."

Drawing on collaborative work with her colleague, Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Lytle elaborated on her definition of teacher research: "Teacher research often involves observation of particular students over time. Its orientation is typically learner-centered, as teachers frame their inquiries to try to understand what happens in classrooms from the perspective of learners. The teachers I have mentioned share an interest in oral and written language, and regard teaching as a process of building the linguistic, cultural, and social resources of learners. Their work includes case studies of individual students, classroom based investigations of the use of oral and/or written language, and ethnographic studies of literacy in students' families and communities. Most research of this sort is not widely known: teachers must struggle to find the time to do it and the results are often published only locally. Nevertheless, teacher research is rapidly becoming a national movement, a sign of growing professionalism among teachers and a significant activity with the potential to alter radically the knowledge base about teaching and learning.

"Let me explain a little more about our definition of teacher research as 'a systematic and intentional inquiry.' By 'systematic,' I mean an ordered way of gathering and recording experience. Such experiences are usually documented by making a written record. By 'intentional,' I mean planned. The purpose of the plan is to pursue knowledge of a particular area related to teaching and learning. 'Inquiry' means that the research stems from or generates questions. Those who do teacher research generally have a 'deliberative' view of teaching, as opposed to a 'technical' view (I am drawing here on the work of Karin Zumwalt and others). Deliberative implies that teaching is an intellectual activity related to the ability to reflect on and make wise decisions about practice. In this view, teaching is seen as an intentional activity, needing great depth of professional knowledge and judgment about actions in situations that are unpredictable and uncertain. A technical view of teaching implies discovering the correct techniques and assuming that all teachers need to use them. In the deliberative view, teachers are professionals who use their knowledge to construct perspectives, choose actions, manage strategic choices, and to a great extent, define their own teaching responsibilities. Teachers who do research regard their studies as opportunities for systematic, intentional inquiry concerning their assumptions about teaching. They also regard the research of other teachers as opportunities to question their own assumptions about teaching."

Lytle later addressed the question of types of teacher research, arguing that we should have a more inclusive concept of what counts as research: "What types of research do teachers do? Research is not just limited to studying what happens in the classroom. It could include, for example, writing by teachers about their teaching in a journal. Lynn Strieb, a first-grade teacher in Philadelphia, published her teaching journal, in which she writes every day, describing what she sees children doing and her interactions with them. She writes, 'The more I wrote, the more I observed in my classroom, the more I wanted to write. As I re-read my journal, I got more ideas for teaching.' Her journal includes records of lessons, conversations, and kids' questions.... Sometimes she thinks of a theme and pulls together everything out of her journal related to that theme.

"A teacher in the Writing Project once said that she had never done any research, but it turned out that she had been keeping a journal about her teaching in a South Philadelphia high school over a period of twenty-one years (Harris, in press). Another type of research can involve keeping and looking at records of students' work over a period of time. Research can involve meeting and discussing with a group of teachers differing interpretations of or reactions to critical words in practice like 'fluency, 'correctness,' 'competence,' or 'composing.' It can involve looking intensively at a piece or several pieces of writing, not in order to evaluate, but to try to understand the experience and perspectives of the student writers."

Lytle gave an example of where problems or questions for teacher research may come from: "Research can be inspired by concern about a particular educational problem. Upon noticing that large numbers of ESL students were failing a writing proficiency exam, Ruth Ray at Wayne State University considered looking at the exam, looking at the grading procedures, interviewing students, or doing an analysis of students' writing. She wanted insight into how non-native speakers become writers. She decided to follow some students through their basic writing classes up to the point of passing the exam. This involved doing periodic interviews of students and their teachers, looking at students' writing, and trying to find connections between what students said, what teachers said, and what could be seen in the samples of writing. In observing one Iraqi female student, she observed practically no change in the student's writing throughout her writing courses over several years. After looking more closely at what was going on, Ray concluded that this student had a fixed idea that writing should be 'giving back knowledge' that was given by the teacher, and this fixed view of writing caused her to continually fail the writing test. The reason why this student finally passed was because the nature of the test was changed. In fact, Ray's research led her to doubt three basic assumptions that she had made about teaching writing: 1) that writing will improve as students move through the writing sequence; 2) that what teachers do facilitates improvement; and 3) that success on the exam depends on improvement that is made in writing classes.

"The questions that teachers attempt to answer in their research often stem from interactions with particular students or from particular classroom experiences. Questions can be related to discrepancies between what teachers intend and what happens, concern about a particular student's lack of progress, concern about a classroom routine that isn't working, conflict or tension between students, a desire to try a new approach, and so on. Some questions that have been asked by ESL teachers in my classes are: How do I deal with students in my 'whole language' class who express a preference for traditional teaching? How could I encourage students to pose questions about what they read instead of just answering my questions? What will happen if I stop giving my students topics for writing and demand that they find their own? How do I handle animosity and cultural clashes between students? In what ways am I imposing, transmitting, teaching my own assumptions, beliefs and values about teaching, language, and learning to my classes? To what extent do my advanced ESL writers experience writing as a process of discovery? Are certain reading and writing strategies culturally specific? Do my students' ways of writing or reading indicate different cultural ways of making meaning? How can I understand that?

"Although these questions may be inspired by specific students or classroom situations, they nevertheless relate to more general and theoretical issues relevant to practice. When I ask, for example, What will happen if I use journals in my classes on women and literacy? at a more general level I am asking, How does students' writing relate to their learning?' Questions may also lead to other questions. Smokey Wilson first asked, What's the relationship between student-teacher talk and students' writing? But that led to, What happens between students and teachers as they talk? and then, What is the relationship between student-teacher talk and students' writing skills?

"Often teachers' questions take the form of two basic questions: What is going on here? and, What happens when...? Lynn Strieb was asking, What's going on?, as she wrote her journal, although in re-reading it she reflected on such questions as, How can I help children learn English?; How can I make children feel comfortable?; and What counts to children as playing, what counts as work, and what is the difference?. What happens when...? involves inquiry into the effects of a particular classroom intervention. Research can also uncover information about how the educational system outside of the classroom is functioning, as when one teacher studied what happens to students when they are first admitted to school. Another teacher studied the extent to which some types of students were being denied access to special services and special programs at her school."

Lytle also spoke about the importance of teacher research for building both local and public knowledge: "What can we know from this kind of research? We can identify discrepancies between our theories and our practice, or between our practices and those of other teachers. Inquiry stimulates, intensifies, and illuminates change. It can become a shared activity, helping to create a community of teachers devoted to improving the education of their students. In the opinion of Louise Phelps of Syracuse University, 'Teaching depends for its richness on a community of shared practice, constituted through exchanges of talk and writing about the curriculum. We are working actively to create such a community among a mixed group numbering close to 150, including full-time faculty, part-time professional writing teachers, and graduate teaching assistants. Our modes of interaction include teacher talk in weekly meetings, co-teaching and mentoring arrangements, professional development activities, task forces, etc. The business of such a community is curriculum development as a form of knowledge making.'

"Teacher research can contribute immeasurably to the broader knowledge base about teaching, learning and language. Teachers' sources of knowledge are extremely rich and complex. When teachers are given time and encouragement to look at their own practice, they can ask questions that others don't ask, and see patterns that others don't see. Finally, teacher research can have a powerful effect on how teachers regard themselves and on how students learn."

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*RESEARCH ON TEACHING AND LEARNING*

# TEACHER RESEARCH: GETTING STARTED

Elizabeth Rorschach, CCNY

Many teachers are frightened by the idea of teacher research, mostly because of traditional views of research as something done in a laboratory by scientists in white coats. Research for many of us means a formal process of experimentation, of collecting data and then carefully interpreting them. Thus we like to think of our own work as very practical, and we leave the research to those whose analytical minds yearn to grapple with numbers.

Yet we ignore the very important fact that each lesson we teach is an experiment: we enter the classroom with an hypothesis that certain activities will enhance our students' learning; we engage them in these activities; we note the students' reactions; we then decide whether the activities were successful; we even frequently report the results to our colleagues. All of these steps represent stages in the research process, and we need only recognize how active we already are as researchers to understand how little it takes to move from this informal type of research to something more formal.

Formal research requires only that we take our natural teacherly impulses a step further, to more carefully take note of what is happening in our classes. We can do this through audio- or video-taping or through having an outside observer, but the easiest way is by keeping a detailed teaching log in which we note classroom events, questions we have about our students and ourselves, hypotheses, successes, failures--whatever strikes us as critical to our understanding of teaching and learning. The log then becomes a permanent record that we can review and draw conclusions from, helping us improve our teaching and, in turn, our students' learning.

Of course teacher research can be done on our own, but joining a group of teachers engaged in similar inquiry can provide the support, encouragement, and objective viewpoint that all researchers need. I've listed below some steps that a group of teachers interested in researching their classes can follow, to begin their projects.

1. Schedule a meeting once a month, and keep the meeting time sacred. The amount of time you'll need depends on the group size; allow 15-20 minutes per person, plus another 30 minutes for warm up and cool down. A group of five would therefore need about two hours.

2. At the first meeting, talk a bit about each person's teaching situation and concerns. Then spend some time writing. Each person should write about her concerns, about what strikes her as curious, about long-term issues she has been wanting to address. Share these writings, and discuss them. Allow the conversation to go where it needs to, but keep track of intriguing ideas that come up. Then, in the last ten minutes, write again, each person focusing on one issue or question as her research project. If there's time, everyone can share these brief writings as well.

3. Before the next meeting, each member should think more about his project, trying to phrase it succinctly. This phrasing could be in the form of, "What happens to X if I do Y?" or it could be, "In what ways is M different from N?" or , "How often does Q happen in my classroom?" Each should also start keeping a teaching log, recording daily classroom happenings as well as special notes about individual students.

4. At the second meeting, each member should be ready to share a "research statement," so that the others can help her plan a method for completing the project. Does it involve changing her teaching in any way? Does it require special assignments for the students? Does she need any help in evaluating the students or their work? Is there anything in her teaching log already pointing to solutions? This is the most difficult part of getting started--defining a project--and this is when group members can be the most helpful. Make sure that each member has a clearly defined project before adjourning the meeting.

5. In subsequent meetings, give each member time to read from his teaching log as well as to report on the progress of his research. If someone hits a dead end, help him find a way out or come up with a new project. If someone finishes, help him come up with ways to publish his results, and then encourage him to start another project.

For teachers who often regret the solitariness of their job, teacher research can provide an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues in ways that will benefit themselves, their students, and the field. It helps them see that teaching doesn't have to be an act performed behind closed doors.

# DIALOGIC APPROACHES TO TEACHER AS RESEARCHER

**Shelley Wong, George Mason University**

When teachers become researchers, we are jolted out of our usual routines, and see things afresh. From the standpoint of professionalizing our profession, infusing new energy into teacher training and professional development of experienced teachers, teachers-as-researchers is a very dynamic concept. When, as teachers, we are learning, we make better teachers. Dialogic research adds to the dimension of teacher-as-researcher, as the focus of this research is on how teacher and student together negotiate meaning.

My dissertation project was to teach the first three Chinese theological students to be sent from the churches in China to the United States to study in American seminaries since 1949. I was hired by the National Council of Churches to design, implement and evaluate a program of English language instruction, with a two-part curriculum: introduction to American culture and preparation for graduate theological studies in English.

My curriculum, heavily influenced by Freire's notion of dialogue, emphasized the processes of inquiry and exploration, rather than a set of skills or material to be learned. The curriculum was negotiated by students and me through an ongoing, open-ended dialogic process involving discussion, writing, reflection and more discussion. Linguistically, the students needed both "survival English" and communication strategies in order to maximize their exposure to American society. They also needed to learn English for academic purposes. And they needed to "do theology" and talk in English about the church and Christianity in China. As the teacher and the one enabling the students to speak and write in English, I needed to explore the Chinese Christian experience as viewed through the eyes of my students. To help us with this learning, we would "learn by doing," as Mao Zedong put it.

We first had to make sense of what "American culture" meant. Aware that American society is not monolithic, but made up of many diverse communities, I designed the curriculum to expose students to both the academic community at Columbia University and at Union Theological Seminary (where they would be studying), and in other New York City communities, since they worshipped in Harlem as well as in both Jewish Reform and Orthodox temples, met with organizations in Chinatown, met with gay-lesbian Christians. I also attempted to expose the students to some of the voices that called for social justice and liberation.

Our curriculum consciously drew from different disciplines to identify, analyze and interpret American culture and society. At the same time, I was also aware that it was impossible to introduce my students to all the voices that were so important in the American experience. So I decided to pose the question, "What is American?" in various situations so that the students could themselves experience and reflect upon some of the diversity in American culture. For example, the students celebrated Thanksgiving by attending a Native American Thanksgiving program and by visiting American families. Their assignment was to interview three Americans about the significance of Thanksgiving and to draw out what different Americans thought about the treatment of Native Americans.

To help students learn about cultural adaptation, we addressed "culture shock" and some of the differences between Chinese and American culture. I had read a good deal of the literature in an attempt to anticipate some problems my students might have with cultural adaptation, and became convinced that it was more realistic to help students make sense of these problems as phenomena, rather than to try to prevent culture shock.

Our dialogic mode also opened up for inquiry our students' experiences as cultural sojourners. They had to both move from one culture to another and serve as bridges between Chinese and Americans, both here and in the churches of China. And to facilitate enabling my students to speak and write in English, I needed to explore the Chinese Christian experience as viewed through the eyes of my students.

The three students were graduate students from Nanjing Theological Union Seminary. They had background in theological studies, but needed to learn the terminology and linguistic structures in English. And as with English for medical purposes, the question of cultural context would play a critical role in English for my students' purposes. There is a growing recognition in the American medical field that there is a need to bring cultural anthropologists into medical schools so that doctors can be trained in how to treat patients from other countries who have different notions of nutrition and health, and different ways of describing symptoms and bodily sensations.

Similarly, in recent years there has been a growing appreciation for cultural context in the field of theology. Theologian Robert Schreiter describes the recent shift away from universality in theology and towards culturally relevant theology:

> While the basic purpose of theological reflection remained the same--namely, the reflection of Christians upon the gospel in light of their own circumstances--much more attention is now being paid to how those circumstances shape the response to the gospel. This focus is being expressed with terms like "localization," "indigenization," "contextualization," and "enculturation" of theology. (Schreiter, 1986, p. 1).

It became clear that my role was to help my students to articulate their own theology in the language of the Western academy. In this respect, I also had to facilitate the interpretation of Western theology not as universal theology, but as particular. And I had to help my students articulate here the needs of their very isolated church in China. My belief was that the students would make a greater contribution to theological reflection and discussion at the academy by remaining true to their own cultural context and identity. The dialogical process was essential for the students to maintain their cultural integrity in an alien environment.

## Implications of a Dialogic Approach For the Research and Writing of this Study

Twenty years ago, during the period of the Third World strikes at San Francisco State and the University of California at Berkeley, David Wellman wrote a paper ,"Towards the Decolonialization of Social Research" (1968), which used a colonial model to describe the problem of researchers who make their careers by describing problems of minority and poor communities. During the struggles on the campuses for ethnic studies, minority enrollment and hiring of minority faculty, there was an overriding demand that education serve the development of poor and minority communities. The egalitarian thrust of the movement for ethnic studies demanded accountability to the community and community involvement and control over the direction of social research. This translated into the demand for commitment to training minority researchers, involving minority researchers in the planning, design and implementation of studies, paying respondents, and making sure that the results of the research were channeled back to assist the community.

The Third World student movements were paralleled by the call for the development of critical research in the social sciences. In "A Method of Critical Research," Donald E. Comstock (1982) argues that using the methodology of positivist social sciences will not help to develop social research that increases the awareness of men and women as agents who can transform their world. This type of critical social science can best be developed through a dialogic method.

A consistent critical method which treats society as a human construction and people as the active subjects of that construction would be based on a dialogue with its subjects rather than the observation or experimental manipulation of people. A critical social science must directly contribute to the revitalization of moral discourse and revolutionary action by engaging its subjects in a process of active self-understanding and collective self-transformation. In this way, science becomes a method for self-conscious action rather than an ideology for the technocratic domination of a passive populace (Comstock, 1982, pp. 371-372). Similarly, the dialogic method of Freire and Mao poses the question of "Knowledge for whom?"-- a question posed not only to students and to teachers, but to researchers as well. Social research is looked at through the lens of who it serves, whether it helps to justify and buttress the dominant social order or whether it helps to change and transform society.

Unlike traditional educational research, in which students are put under a magnifying glass or given "treatments" without their knowledge, the dialogic method emphasizes increasing the awareness of the student, so that the student is a subject rather than an object to be manipulated. Dialogical relationships provide a reciprocity of teaching and learning by teacher and student. The implication for research is that it too should be rooted in a reciprocal relationship between the researcher and subjects.

## My Study of a Study

My dissertation was a study of a study: of my students' dialogic journey through the curriculum in which they were called to reflect upon their language learning and cross cultural experiences through readings and methods of observation-participation, and to articulate that experience through discussion and writing and sharing journals.

In the belief that good teaching is informed by good research and that good educational research is informed by good teaching, my role was both teacher and researcher in this study. Although "teacher-as-researcher," "researcher-as-teacher" may have a certain balance and symmetry on paper, in reality I found constant tension, in attention, time and energy, between my responsibility to my students as a teacher and my responsibility as a researcher. During the year with the students I felt a pull between wanting to devote myself to preparing materials and teaching the students and my role as researcher, gathering data on and writing about the students' linguistic and cultural journey. I resolved the issue by concluding that the best way for me to conduct research was to concentrate on doing the best possible job teaching. I also set data collecting standards for myself so that data would be gathered regularly and as unobtrusively as possible.

During the 1987-88 academic year, I collected data as follows: 1) audio and videotapes of one session a week; 2) students' writing; 3) interviews of the 3 students, other international students, and Americans with whom they interacted; 4) videotapes, audiotapes and photos of my subjects' interactions with Americans. I also interviewed the three subjects after my year with them was over and they had begun studying in American graduate school between 1988 and 1990. Then, as I began writing my dissertation, the dialogue came around full circle as my students became my teachers, serving as readers for the dissertation. They filled in many gaps in my understanding of both their backgrounds in China and their experiences in the United States. They also corrected my Chinese Pinyin, and criticized and refined the many drafts of the study.

## Conclusion

The dialogic journey recorded in my study provides a vision of teaching and learning in which there is a transforming power of education. At the heart of the dialogic approach is learning in community with others. The Confucian ideal *Ren* is comprised of two written Chinese characters for "human" and "two." Tu Wei-Ming (1985) has translated the Confucian virtue *Ren* into "learning to become human" because one cannot learn to be human without being in relationship with others.

Using a dialogic method in research increases the awareness of men and women as active subjects rather than as passive objects to be manipulated in research experiments. The dialogue between the researcher and researched can open up new possibilities for the learning, growth, and transformation of both the researcher and the researched. In the American context, further research is needed using the dialogic method with many different subjects of diverse backgrounds. Using the dialogic method in research and in forging new arenas provides a space for multiple voices in American society, particularly what Maxine Greene (1988, p. xiii) calls "submerged voices." These are voices seeking justice and liberation, the dreamers who have a different vision for the world, the voices that are critical of what is, the scapegoats who are attacked for being different: African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, women of diverse racial backgrounds, the homeless, the poor, the disinherited, the disenfranchised.

We approach the 21st century, as educational researchers, in a troubled and divided world. TESL researchers need to ask, "Is this study going to even address the issue of meeting the needs of linguistic minority students, or is it going to be used to blame the victim?" We also need to ask in which ways we are involving the subjects of our research in the research itself. The changing complexion and the internationalization of our urban centers, and the atmosphere of increased racial and economic polarization pose a great challenge to modern-day educators. The changing face of America highlights the need for openness, flexibility, sensitivity, and skills in learning/teaching language across cultural/social boundaries. If we seek to develop education that is empowering, how can we design research that has nothing to do with empowerment? If we seek dialogue and partnerships between parents and teachers or communities and schools, how can we design studies in which we don't tap the insights of the various partners? By engaging in dialogic methods of research and teaching, by learning to listen to the multiple voices, competing definitions, and multiple perspectives not only in the larger society, but within our students and ourselves, we as teachers and researchers have a role to play in creating a more democratic, inclusive and human America.

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# COMMUNITY: A THEMATIC WRITING COURSE

**Len Fox, Brooklyn College**

In her book, Comprehensive Peace Education, Betty Reardon defines peace education as education about and preparation for "efforts to achieve human dignity for all people and to realize a viable global society on an ecologically healthy planet" (Reardon, 1988, p. 31). Such education aims to develop in students "the capacity and inclination to make peace, to bring about a nonviolent and just social order on this planet" (Reardon, 1988, p. 56). More specifically, Reardon would have teachers develop in students and in themselves the "seven fundamental R's of peace education": reflection, responsibility, risk, reconciliation, recovery, reconstruction, and reverence (Reardon, 1988, p. 61).

In recent years, I have become interested in developing thematic writing courses for ESL students in which, while learning English, students can also read, speak, write and learn about the sorts of issues that Reardon raises. A few years ago, I developed a thematic course called "Planethood," based on Benjamin Ferencz's book of that title on the possibility of working toward nuclear disarmament and world government. More recently, I have developed a thematic writing course based on M. Scott Peck's book, The Different Drum: Community Making and World Peace. (1987).

In The Different Drum, Peck writes of his early experiences of community, of his work as a consultant to groups trying to establish a spirit of community, and of how we might create more of a spirit of community in our world. In using the book in my class, I decided to divide the book into five sections and to read one section every two weeks. On alternate weeks, I brought in questions and articles and other topics related to the theme of community, such as crime, the International Year of the Child, the Persian Gulf crisis, and American attitudes toward immigrants.

Before beginning to read the text, I assigned as a discussion and essay topic, "Is the place where you live a good community?" One student, in response, wrote that Chinatown is not a good community because it is overcrowded, the people work too many hours, and the people do not have time to communicate with each other. By being willing to discuss such a personal topic, this student was opening himself and the classroom to Reardon's first essential step in peace education, reflection. I facilitated this step in class by telling my own opinions and impressions and by reading both my own and student essays on this topic. I was pleased to see that the student who wrote about Chinatown ended his essay by recognizing the need for Reardon's second step of responsibility, clearly illustrated by his last sentence, "The job we are going to do is solving the problems."

In the first part of The Different Drum, Peck tells about some of his own early experiences of community, as in going to high school at the Manhattan Friends Seminary. After students had written a summary and discussed this section, I gave them essay questions which allowed them to relate this part of the book to their own experiences. One student -- in response to the assigned topic, "Write about a time in the past when you felt like a member of a community" -- wrote about the loneliness that she felt when she first came to the United States. Fortunately, a counselor gave her the good advice, "Commit yourself to the community!" She then joined the Chinese Culture Club at the college. In her essay, she states her conclusion, that "We should share our laughter and fears together." This student was taking Reardon's step of risk when she told a counselor about her loneliness, and again when she told the class. When we tell others of our weakness, they may react by not respecting us, or by telling us that we should not feel as we do. On the other hand, they may admit that they have the same feelings, and we may then

support each other in attempting to solve our common problems together.

In the second part of The Different Drum, Peck describes the stages that a group usually goes through on the way to becoming a community, including 1) pseudocommunity (avoidance of conflict), 2) chaos (unproductive conflict), 3) emptiness (opening oneself to others), and 4) community (working together productively, with mutual acceptance and respect). One student -- in response to the question, "Have you ever experienced what Peck means by 'emptiness?" -- told how, as a child, she could not forgive her mother for not doing anything when her dog had eaten rat poison, and thus causing the death of her dog. Finally, she managed to empty herself of this anger as, in her words, "I came to a thought that I would do what she did if I had been in my mother's situation. I forgave her." It was fortunate that this student was finally able to put herself in her mother's place, which led to what Reardon describes as reconciliation. There are those who hold grudges against members of their own families for their whole life. If we are able to hold such grudges, how much easier it is to maintain feelings of separation, fear and hostility against strangers, members of other cultures, other races, other nations. Yet if we open ourselves to the possibility, reconciliation can occur.

In the third part of The Different Drum, Peck opines that we are on a spiritual journey toward becoming people who will be able to form a peaceful community. On this journey, we may go through the stages of being 1) egoist, 2) formal religious, 3) skeptic, and 4) mystic. As we develop through these stages, we approach what Reardon describes as recovery, a reclaiming of the feeling of connectedness that we had with the world at a younger, more innocent age. While discussing this topic, a student in my class wrote about how religion can play a role in recovery, by telling of a young man who had become a gang member, but was saved by joining a church.

In another part of The Different Drum, Peck discusses different ways in which a community may be formed, including the occurrence of a crisis. A student -- in response to the question, "Were you ever part of a community created by a crisis?" -- tells how the accidental shooting of a child by a drug dealer aroused her neighborhood, so that now "They are willing to work and deal directly with the problems. Today, my neighborhood is a better place to live because everyone shows more of their concern." The specific steps taken by the student's community members would be described by Reardon as reconstruction. If the will exists, the ways of reconstruction can be found.

In addition to writing weekly essays in class, student were assigned to write a short research paper on a topic related to the theme of community. For example, a few students wrote about a dispute in their neighborhood between the Black community and the owners of a Korean grocery store. Through this assignment, they were able to not only learn how to write a research paper, but also to deepen their understanding of an issue that affected their own life and that of their neighbors.

While taking this class, students were not only making progress in writing, but they were thinking and learning about important topics that could positively affect their future lives. In fact, I was finding that the course was affecting me as well. Because we were talking about how each individual has the responsibility to do what he can to create a spirit of community, I found myself becoming more active in neighborhood organizations in my own community, in faculty meetings aimed at creating a greater spirit of community at my college, and in professional groups attempting to have a positive effect on education locally and nationally. Students also told me that they were for the first time becoming active in groups both in their neighborhoods and at the college. In these ways, we were beginning to develop in ourselves what Reardon calls the capacity of reverence: "the deepest appreciation of the fullness and infinite possibilities of life," "the source of our capacity to hope and the ground from which human compassion springs" (1988, pp. 65-66).

In the final part of The Different Drum, Peck speculates on how we could establish a greater sense of community in relation to such social institutions as the arms race, the church, and the government. The following excerpt from a student essay -- in response to the question, "Will

we have world peace in the future?" -- illustrates well the kinds of attitudes that students were developing in this class:

> It is time for our leaders to start thinking about the future of our world. They must see the world as a whole, not only their own countries, and start to help each other with their difficulties instead of trying to take something by force. Only with this kind of behavior, it is going to be possible to have world peace.

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Note: If you would like a copy of Len Fox's syllabus for "Community", write to him at 350 First Street, Brooklyn, NY 11215.

# THE EFFECT OF CULTURAL BACKGROUND ON PUERTO RICAN AND AMERICAN READER RESPONSES TO SELECTED SHORT STORIES

Susan Hopper-Weil, CCNY

In order to understand how the Puerto Rican culture and experience might influence Puerto Rican students' responses to literature, I asked three 18-year-old Puerto Rican and three 18-year-old American women to respond in interviews to questions on family issues and relationships within three short stories.

The three stories I used represented unique cultures: one, an American story by John Cheever entitled "The Season of Divorce"; another, a Puerto Rican story entitled "There's a Little Colored Boy in the Bottom of the Water"; and another, judged to be more culturally neutral or, so to speak, universal, "Neighbor Rosicky" by Willa Cather.

I selected students who were as similar as possible in their reading abilities, socio-economic backgrounds, marital status, and education. And the two culturally influenced stories that I selected were approximately equal as to cultural-boundedness. And I did a systematic and objective content analysis of the reader responses to determine, for example, if a response were more psychologically oriented or socioculturally oriented; whether it focused more on the individual or the family; and whether it focused more on the reader's personal experience or on the text.

I found that culture does indeed appear to shape readers' responses, and that cultural differences in responses appear to account for significant differences in the responses of the Puerto Rican and American readers to the three short stories.

The three American readers' responses were quite similar in their psychological emphasis on the needs of the individual self above all else. In all three stories, the American readers focused on the individual characters and whether or not they were able to achieve self-fulfillment. In essence, the Americans projected their own personal "identity theme" of self-fulfillment on the individual characters and whether or not they were able to achieve self-fulfillment. As a result of this perspective, the wife, Ethel, in "The Season of Divorce" was viewed negatively for her inability to escape--or at least confront--her dull and dreary routine. Rosicky and Mary in "Neighbor Rosicky," however traditional and conventional they may be, were seen as leading independent and individually fulfilling lives within the context of--but never subsumed by--the larger family unit. This feminist-oriented thinking extended to "Little Colored Boy," where the treatment of women as second-class "beasts of burden," however culturally understandable it may be, was condemned by these readers.

In contrast to the Americans' preoccupation with independence and self-fulfillment, the Puerto Ricans' major concern was with marital harmony and family unity. This theme was repeatedly emphasized throughout their responses to each story. They felt that Ethel's responsibility was to preserve the love and union of the family. None of the readers chastised or condemned the husband's behavior, nor was there any mention of a desire to escape a confining and seemingly empty relationship. These readers felt it was the wife's duty to help and understand the husband, and not vice-versa.

The Puerto Rican readers also found the characters in "Neighbor Rosicky" to be above reproach. Still, while Mary is seen as a loving and dutiful wife, it is Rosicky in his role as patriarch and provider who is seen as sustaining the family. Unlike Rosicky, these readers viewed the husband and father in "Little colored boy" as far from ideal because he is unable to adequately

fulfill his role as provider. No matter that he and his family are the victims of poverty and adverse social factors beyond their control. The Puerto Rican readers also criticized both parents for not providing the necessary love and attention to their doomed child. These readers registered the same traditional responses to other familial and cultural elements as well: children, education, employment, and extended family.

In summary, while the American readers' unique identity theme might be said to be self-fulfillment, the Puerto Ricans--coming, as they do, from an ascriptive culture--focused on their social links and obligations to their immediate and extended family group--a focus that led, not surprisingly, to a preponderance of sociocultural responses.

The stories I used influenced readers' making of meaning. This was most evident in the two culturally loaded stories. The Americans preferred the mode of individual feeling, or the psychological mode, and switched to the sociocultural mode when they read "Little Colored Boy," in part a sociological piece. By the same token, the Puerto Rican readers, who tended to prefer the sociocultural mode, given their focus on the theme of love and union in the family, switched partially to the psychological mode when they confront the introspective and emotional content of "Season of Divorce." And in the process of changing their normal response habits or patterns to meet the demands of culturally different texts, both sets of readers became more rather than less like each other.

The fact that culture plays a significant role in reader response has critical implications for pedagogy--especially in the ESL or bilingual classroom, which is literally defined by its cultural diversity. As ESL/bilingual educators, we must ask ourselves:

1. Do we really use this cultural diversity in our classrooms as the powerful teaching and learning tool that it can be? As the raw material for so much potentially rich and meaningful learning?
2. Or do we subscribe to and endorse it in our words (and maybe even in our hearts), but in our actual classroom practices, materials, and approaches, merely pay it lip service?
3. Isn't this cultural individuality a part of what we really mean when we talk of empowering our students to be the unique individuals they really are?
4. In short, are we teaching only in the bilingual classroom? Aren't we also teaching in the bi-, tri-, and multi-cultural classroom?

We must not simply take note that culture influences responses; we must use this knowledge to teach and learn by.

# BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE: A TEACHING STRATEGY TO PROMOTE EFFECTIVE EDITING

**Richard Woytowich, NYC Technical College**

When college ESL students prepare for an essay examination, they are usually advised to concentrate on the message they wish to convey to the reader, rather than on grammatical considerations, until their compositions are nearly complete. In my own classes, however, this postponement appeared to have some adverse effects. Virtually none of my students could identify the errors in their "finished" compositions unless I marked their locations. When they did make changes on their own, they often replaced an acceptable construction with an unacceptable one. In the course of a semester, my students' performance in these areas did not seem to change. While these problems were undoubtedly not unique to my classes, I could not accept them as routine. I suspected that they were symptoms of a mismatch between instructor's classroom practices and learners' capabilities, and believed that they were worthy of further investigation. I began with a search of the available literature, particularly in the area of psycholinguistics. While most of the work in this field has dealt with spoken language, a number of researchers have attempted to deal with writing as well. I hoped that their findings would shed some light on the origins of my students' difficulties.

I found my first clue in a study by Daiute (1981), who suggested that inexperienced writers cannot be expected to hold more than six or seven words, or one "perceptual clause," in their short-term memories at any given time. She suggested that experienced writers learn to encode the semantic information which they will need to finish a longer sentence acceptably, while inexperienced writers are often unable to do so. In support of her hypothesis, she identified several characteristic errors frequently made by these developing writers, errors which often result in garbled syntax. In Daiute's study, 11.3% of the sentences in a sample group of 215 college placement exam papers contained such errors. To determine whether learners in my own classes were similarly affected, I carried out a small-scale classroom research project. I chose several of my advanced ESL writing students, and performed an error analysis on compositions which they wrote near the beginning, in the middle, and near the end of the term. Near the start of the semester, 23.9% of the individual errors were found to be related to short-term memory limitations. There was little change in the frequency or distribution of errors over the semester. Six of the seven students in my sample made at least one short-term-memory related error, suggesting that this problem was more widespread in my classes than in Daiute's sample group.

Of course, editing involves reading as well as writing -- or, in psycholinguistic terms, sentence processing as well as sentence production. I needed confirmation that the same limitations would apply to both processes. That confirmation, however, was slow in coming. For several semesters, I had to be satisfied with a suggestion by Slobin (1979) that listeners tend to hold only one clause at a time in short-term memory. While recognizing that written and spoken language are perceived by different senses, I assumed that both types of input would be processed similarly once they reached the brain, and that both readers and listeners would therefore suffer from the same limitations. Recently, Garman (1990) provided explicit support for this notion. While he suggested that the notion of a single, all-purpose short-term memory was likely to be an over-simplification, his description of sentence processing ("parsing") was in substantial agreement with those of earlier authors, and dealt with visual as well as auditory inputs. All of these findings pointed toward a single conclusion. My students were apparently attempting to write sentences which were too long to hold in their short-term memories, and were therefore unable to edit much of their own work!

Now that research had identified the problem, I could begin the search for a potential solution. My first instinct was to look for an earlier stage of the composing process, in which structures were still short and simple enough to hold in short-term memory, and ask my students to do some preliminary editing at that point. Unfortunately, the step I was looking for did not seem

to exist. If I encouraged my students to make an outline or idea map to plan their compositions, most of them would write only a word or phrase for each item. If I encouraged them to write a complete rough draft, they nearly always tried to write as if they were producing a finished composition, full of compound and complex sentences, with all the transitions and other trimmings in place. The first of these alternatives offered students too little material for useful editing, while the second saddled them with too much.

My only recourse was to ask my students to create an additional step in the writing process. This step gradually took one of two forms, depending on the length of the writing assignment and the time available for writing. Early in the semester, when the assignments were short and time was not a factor, I asked my students to write two complete drafts of each composition. (Depending on the complexity of the topic, each writing period might be preceded by a brainstorming session.) While writing their first drafts, I asked them to deliberately limit the complexity of their sentences, using simple sentences whenever possible. After a few weeks, the assignments grew longer, and time limitations made two complete drafts impractical. I therefore asked my students to begin by creating idea maps during the pre-writing phase of each assignment, and then to expand each entry in their idea maps into a complete sentence before beginning their actual compositions. In either case, they were then urged to make any necessary corrections to ensure, to the best of their ability, the grammatical acceptability of their work up to that point. I've done my best to keep this concern for acceptability from growing into a preoccupation. After all, the purpose of a draft or idea map is to help the writer organize ideas. I've only asked my classes to pay attention to mechanics after that primary goal has been achieved.

To help ensure that the benefits of their early editing step would be preserved through the remaining stages of the writing process, I asked my students to develop their compositions from the simple sentences which they had written, using the sentence combining techniques which they had learned in previous ESL courses. They were also urged to wait until this point in the writing process to add transitions and insert additional descriptive words and phrases. When working from a first draft, learners could build up an entire composition in this way. When working from an outline or idea map, students could develop the complete introduction, as well as the lead sentence of each body paragraph, by this procedure, leaving the remainder of the composition to be written in the usual way.

As might be expected, when I began to implement this approach in my classes, the results were not uniformly positive. Some students had invested so much time and effort in the development of their own individual approaches to writing that they were unwilling to try anything radically different. I've even had a few students who have generally been among the best writers in the class to begin with, and have generally shown the fewest symptoms of short-term memory limitations. Recognizing that their needs were different from those of the rest of the class, I have generally tried to work with each of them on an individual basis. These difficulties have been far outweighed by the benefits which this approach has brought to those students who have adopted it. First of all, my students have found it easier to find and fix errors in their simple sentences than in their finished compositions. Virtually every one of them has made significant progress, both in editing skill and in overall writing quality. This approach has helped them not just to avoid errors, but to think ahead about alternative structures for combining two or more ideas, so that they are less likely to be trapped in an overly difficult construction to begin with. It has also made the transition from lower-level courses smoother, since it builds on students' previous experience in sentence combining. In effect, it has encouraged students to see sentence combining not as a textbook skill, to be practiced on other people's sentences, but as a tool to be applied regularly to their own writing.

Most previous advocates of sentence combining have seen it as a stage through which learners pass on their way to full mastery of the writing process. Indeed, Ney (1974) suggested that sentence combining would eventually help learners to outgrow the limitations of their short-term memories. However, this growth comes slowly for college ESL students. For some individuals, it may never occur. This does not mean that the strategy has failed. If a student learns to build, piece by piece, what he or she could not produce as a whole, I count it as a success. While I have not made a detailed follow-up study of this issue, I have had a number of

conversations with former students, all indicating that they have used this approach successfully in their freshman composition courses. The only drawback they reported was a need for more writing time than their conventionally taught classmates.

Teachers can benefit from this approach as well as learners. Writing conferences can be more fruitful, because an instructor can see steps in the writing process -- those which lie between the traditional outline and the traditional first draft -- which were previously invisible. Better still, this technique is most effective with those sentences which defy correction by traditional means. Rather than mark such sentences as "awkward," the instructor can help the writer to look back at the simple sentences in the draft of idea map and explore other, less troublesome ways in which they can be combined to get the intended message across. If the troublesome construction occurs in a portion of the composition which was not detailed in a draft, the instructor can help the student break it down into simpler constituents, at which point the same principles can be applied. To date, I have not attempted to develop an objective measure of the effectiveness of this strategy. However, I believe that there is more than enough subjective evidence to confirm its value. While it is not a panacea, it has been found to be most effective with those students who are most in need of help, and with those sentences which are most difficult to correct by traditional means. It has not been found to interfere with students' ability to generate ideas freely, and has been found to be useful to students when they go on to take upper level writing courses. These benefits have convinced me to continue to use this approach in my own classes, and to recommend it for your consideration.

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# STUDENTS AS RESEARCHERS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

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For the last several years we have been designing activities focused on how people learn English -- activities that two of our classes can use individually and collaboratively. Each semester we have attempted to add something new to this project, something that will spark the interests of our students and ourselves so that we can continue to be excited about what we believe is an important curricular goal and can pass our enthusiasm on to the students. In Spring 1991 we attempted to shift more of the responsibility of designing activities to the students in our classes, and it is the specifics of this work that are our focus in this discussion.

A major impetus for the development of this project was our wish to bring language learning processes to a more conscious level for ESL students. Just as the processes of writing and reading have received increasingly greater attention in our curricula, we were guided by our belief that students have some expertise in learning language. In addition, we believe that helping them develop the ability to articulate their own processes and investigate some of the ways in which others learn language might aide them (and us) in understanding just what is involved in learning a second language. We also hoped to aid students, through research and discussion, to expand their repertoires of language learning practices.

When we first began thinking about designing student-centered language learning activities, we were guided by the work of Shirley Brice Heath (1983; 1990) and attempted to adapt some of her ideas about students investigating how language is used to our own interests in student investigations into how language is learned. While Heath's ideas continue to form the backbone of our project, student feedback, our own intuitions, and our interest in discovering what others are doing have encouraged us to alter the specifics each semester. Our concern with the importance of students assuming more responsibility for their own learning and the types of tasks we have been suggesting fit nicely with current theories on learning -- both language learning and learning in general.

Of particular interest to us have been projects described by Anthony Petrosky (1991), Robert Marzano (1991), Cynthia Onore (1990), and Larry Johannesen (1990). Although the subject matter of these reports varies (mathematics, social studies, English composition), all share several basic approaches that have been important to us: collaborative learning, student-centered curriculum long-term projects, and a great deal of reflection on the part of students about what they know, what they have learned from others, and how they might apply this new knowledge to their lives and the lives of others.

The two classes to participate in our project in the spring of 1991 were intermediate ESL classes -- one a Level 2 and the other a Level 3 in our four-level program at Borough of Manhattan Community College. Both classes were involved in the College's Freshman Year Project as well. The Level 2 class was part of a blocked course for entering freshmen requiring students to enroll in the same ESL, reading and study skills classes concurrently. The Level 3 course was paired with an introductory business course, enabling students to develop language skills in the context of business issues. Enrollment in both ESL classes was limited to 20 students. Both classes met 6 hours a week and included weekly sessions in the ESL Computer Lab. For ease of discussion, we will describe project activities on a month-by-month basis.

During the first month of the term, students in both classes wrote journal entries about how they had been learning English. They generated class lists of activities for learning English (e.g., read a children's book; read aloud into a tape recorder, then listen to your pronunciation;

watch a TV talk show), and students selected new activities to try out and report on. "Watching Oprah Winfrey," one student observed, "not only was good for improving my English, but taught me something about American culture." We introduced the semester's project at this point and students in both classes read and discussed a handbook that our students from the prior semester had written about how they and others learned English.

In month two, pairs of students from the two classes interviewed each other about how they were learning English. Students then wrote about the learning strategies of their partners to the teacher of the other class. We responded to the letters, often asking for more information and/or clarification, asking students to draw inferences and make suggestions about their and their partners' methods of improving their language skills. Students used our comments and their own curiosity as the basis for a second interview with the same partner and wrote us second letters, which we again answered. We have used this activity for several semesters and have found that students enjoy talking to those from another class, writing letters to us, and receiving what we hope are individual and interesting replies. And we continue to believe that the time needed for us to write twenty letters, although substantial, is more creatively spent than that responding to class sets of essays.

Students in the Level 2 class read several excerpts by writers describing their own language learning and literacy experiences (Liu Zhongren, Jamaica Kincaid, Richard Rodriguez), and students from both classes met in small groups to plan for research activities and class presentations. Students in the Level 3 class viewed a videotape of a successful language learner we had invited to speak with our students during a previous semester, providing them with one option for a research activity and presentation. Class presentations in the Level 2 class included audiotaped individual interviews, our videotaped class interview, and guest speakers. Excessive absence, student frustration, and several other factors among Level 3 students resulted in the class not completing this activity.

At the end of the month, we introduced a project to be completed during the spring break. Students were asked to form a hypothesis about language leaning, formulate several specific questions about the issue addressed in the hypothesis, ask these questions to two different language learners, tape record or take notes on their brief interviews, and write about their experiences.

Because our expected break of a week stretched into nearly a month due to student strikes at the College, no in-class activities were possible in month 3. And while students in Level 2 returned intact at the end of April, this was not the case for the Level 3 class. Several students did not return to class, several attended sporadically, and very few completed the project as it had been envisioned. Rather than exacerbating a troubling situation, we made the decision to abandon project activities and to focus instead on preparation for the final writing exam. Students in the Level 2 class, most of whom had completed the out-of-class assignment, built on their interviews by combining information, reporting outcomes to classmates, doing additional reading and discussion of language learning strategies, writing on related topics, and preparing a handbook that would be distributed to other ESL students in the following semester.

In reflecting on our experiences during the Spring of 1991, we have attempted to account for the relative success and lack of success in the two classes involved in this project. In the less successful class it is easy to blame several unforseen factors, for instance, unusually low reading scores, which led to a high level of anxiety and poor attendance and completion rates for students, and serious personal problems of individual students. On the other hand, the Level 2 class proved to be cohesive, highly motivated, and enthusiastic, encouraging each other to reach beyond the classroom to expand their knowledge.

But it is our belief that we learn as much from failure as from successes, and we continue to be enthusiastic about the possibilities of expanding our project, reshaping our ideas, tapping students' experience as language learners, and encouraging students to become more active and responsible learners in the coming semesters.

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# DID YOU CATCH THAT? STUDENTS RESEARCHING ORAL PRESENTATIONS

**Dominic Pietrosimone, City College**

Rather than having a student speak while I, the instructor, dutifully take down notes as the other members of the class partially listen or rehearse their upcoming speeches, I chose to make the speech class as student-centered as possible, where the listeners are as important as the speaker. Because my presentation at the CUNY ESL Council's conference centered on a videotape of a class, I can only approximate the class dynamics of the interaction among the listeners and speaker. What I hope to do here is to describe the rationale for the design of the course, how I set up the class, and typical oral presentations, and to suggest possible topics and follow-up activities.

The course, Intermediate Spoken English, is open to Jersey City State College ESL students, most of whom are working full time and wish to communicate better at work and in other courses. Over the five semesters I have been teaching the course, I have kept a log, noting what was successful and what needed change.

I have found that the most important class is the first, when I am on stage trying to persuade the students that the more they listen actively to each other, the better speakers they will become. The errors they hear most often will probably resemble their own errors. Since it's difficult to monitor one's own speech (indeed, this only comes with extended practice), by listening to each other they are beginning to monitor for form as well as for meaning, which will eventually affect their own speech. As the course progresses, students come to see the validity of active listening and its effects on their own speaking.

At the end of this discussion, to break the students of stage fright, I ask each student to go to the front of the room and speak about themselves for one minute. Their reactions to this exercise are invariably that it was "the longest minute" they've ever experienced.

The first topic I usually assign is "Problems I had with English when I first came to this country." From past experience, I have found that this topic generates anecdotes of similar encounters, sometimes amusing, sometimes embarrassing. The listeners smile or nod their heads in empathy, and a bond begins to form. For the first three or four presentations, I ask the students to write out their talks for two reasons. One, it gives them a script in the event that they falter, though they are asked not to read it, but to refer to it as needed. Should they read, I stop them and ask them to try again the next class. The second reason is that it gives them the chance to think about sentence boundaries and organization. They are asked to speak for two minutes at the beginning, gradually going on to three and four minutes, or more in some cases by the end of the semester.

Since I grade holistically, students eventually come to "feel" what grade a student should receive after I critique the first three or four. At the end of each presentation, after the students and I have commented, I ask the listeners to jot down their assessment and I randomly call on several students to read their grades. They generally agree, but when there are differences, I ask different students to explain their decisions. I write mine down as well, and on occasion have changed it to agree with the majority.

Each student buys an audiotape and brings it to class. On the desk there is a tape recorder. When the student goes up to speak, s/he inserts the tape and lets us know when ready to begin. Those listening have a pad or notebook open, ready to write down their observations.

At first this seems daunting to the speaker, and indeed it is, but they soon gain confidence and continue speaking even though they see their listeners writing. To ease their anxiety, I also ask students to write down positive comments as well as errors. I usually sit to the extreme side or behind a student, so that the speaker won't look at me or watch me writing. At the end of the speech, the students have to say, "Thank you. Any comments?"

The listeners always begin with positive comments, like, "I had a similar experience," or"You spoke clearly," or "I learned _____ about your culture." The speaker has a chance to self-correct if a listener points out an error. And if the listener wrongly perceived an error, s/he can profit from the speaker's correct usage and any discussion that ensues. During this whole activity, the tape is running. Thus the student will be able to listen to the whole thing at home, noting errors as a follow-up activity. The criteria for assessing the oral presentation are addressed through these questions. Was it understandable? Was it adequately organized? Was there a minimum of errors? Did the content reflect some thinking about the topic?

Generally students make at least seven presentations a semester. Over the past five semesters, I have noted that the following topics seem to be particularly popular:

Describe some aspect of your culture or a national holiday.
Give a demonstration on how to do something.
Do an advertisement.
Describe a book you've read or a film you've seen and tell it/why you liked it.
Describe someone you admire and tell why.
Take a controversial topic and present some arguments from both sides.

Toward the end of the semester, I have students pick topics out of a grab bag and give them ten minutes to prepare a short speech. I also have students read scenes from plays or films.

When I have asked students to note their errors from listening to their tapes at home, they seemed to derive little benefit from this activity. So now I have them rehearse their speeches in small groups before the presentations, and I alert the group for the kinds of errors/weaknesses to be on the lookout for. What I am observing is that there is much more attention to error in small group sessions. And overall, by opening up the focus on the speaker to include the listeners in an active role, I have found that the class is a more dynamic community, in which all the members are actively engaged almost all of the time and becoming better speakers and listeners as a result.

# THE ESL STUDENT AS RESEARCHER: COLLABORATIVE TEACHER-STUDENT RESEARCH

Gloria Silverstein, City College

The ESL student, as a member of the postsecondary academic community, must become an active participant in the research enterprise. Research is a special kind of activity that looks at a problem to help uncover, discover or even revise facts; to test the truth of hypotheses; to prove or disprove theories; and develop applications.

All college students must acquire research skills, particularly objectivity. Whether the research is, for example, qualitative, quantitative, introspective, ethnographic or experimental, students must be able to identify their own and others' biases if their findings are to be of value. Here, value is taken to mean yielding knowledge that is replicable, transferable, and predictive.

As a first step in helping the ESL student to become a researcher, a curriculum has been designed at CCNY to train the intermediate level ESL student to conduct academic library research in preparation for mainstreaming into regular college courses. A large number of ESL students at CCNY expect to major in the sciences. To respond to such interests, the theme of this particular course is, "The Impact of Science and Technology on Our Culture and Values."

A whole-language approach to the curriculum is used. The writing models for the course are The Right Stuff, by Tom Wolfe, and The Double Helix, by James Watson, both of which look at people involved in scientific and technological discoveries, their frailties, strengths, and humanity as well as the impact their work has had on our social, political, and moral lives. Films of both books are used to further help students develop a contextual understanding of the issues and events in the books.

Each student selects an area of scientific or technological interest and writes a 30-40 page library research paper. Working in small groups organized by interests, students first explore what they would really like to learn about and why. Subjects that students have written on include robotics, artificial intelligence and expert systems, lasers, superconductors, networking and communications, computer-aided design in architecture, microchips, solar energy, heating and cooling in building design, the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, and the Brooklyn Bridge and its impact on New York City.

Students work hard to develop paraphrasing, summarizing, synthesizing and interpreting skills. They also learn to identify reasonable basic questions that become the core of their research efforts. It is this particular activity that contributes most to the students' development of more objective research skills. For example, in one activity, students develop criteria for creating and selecting useful research questions. During this activity, students learn to relate and sequence questions in logical and coherent arrangements that organize and arrange their thinking. They must then locate timely information relevant to their research in encyclopedias, monographs, journals, magazines, newspapers, and books, review the articles and books, and select at least 8 articles and 2 books on which to base their research. They take notes (often up to 300 4x6 cards) and then synthesize their data and interpret them in their conclusions. By the end of the term, the students complete an original draft, a revised draft, and then a final draft.

In the process of developing research skills, the students become intellectual in their approach to materials, and more objective in analyzing both the content that they read and their own writing. These skills prepare them to research their own performance as well, and the quality of their writing is usually impressive. They move successfully from a simplistic, personalized form of writing to objective, evaluative academic writing, and greatly enhance their knowledge of their research topic and of English in the bargain.

*RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE USES*

# CONSTRAINTS ON REPAIRS IN NONNATIVE-NONNATIVE CONVERSATIONS

**Paul Arcario and Rashida Aziz, LaGuardia Community College**

In their study of nonnative-nonnative (NNS-NNS) conversational pair work, Gass and Varonis (1989) report that their student subjects were able to correct each other's errors as well as subsequently produce the corrected forms in their speech during the course of the conversation. They argue that "not only do learners repair deviant forms in the speech of other learners, but that as a result of these repairs, the 'repaired' learners incorporate standard language forms into their own speech. The corrected forms may appear immediately or after considerable delay" (p. 75).

In our replication of the Gass and Varonis study, we examined the NNS-NNS conversations to see how much corrective feedback was given, and how many corrections were incorporated in subsequent utterances in those conversations. We were thus interested in discovering the degree to which group and pair work result in grammatical development through the incorporation of feedback students provide each other.

Our study indicated that group work may not be as valuable in providing opportunities for corrective feedback as Gass and Varonis would seem to suggest, since our data yielded very few instances of such correction. Our findings suggest that the overriding concern of students engaged in group work is to display an appearance of knowledge and personal competence; collaborating to display competence thus appears to be a major organizer of student conversations, limiting not only the number of times students will openly correct each other, but also perhaps the degree to which they will engage in other types of negotiation of meaning as well.

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# GRASSROOTS RESEARCH ON THE LANGUAGE OF PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Judy Manton, NYC Adult Education

In preparation for writing You and Your Child's School: For the ESL Parent (forthcoming from New Reader's Press), for several years I gathered data on the language used in public school oral and written communications, and introduced this language into my classroom. I focused on language needed by LEP parents for activities such as talking with a school counselor, understanding letters regarding special education requirements and procedures, becoming acquainted with various types of ESL and bilingual programs, participating in report card conferences and understanding standardized tests and SATs. The goal of my research and resultant ESL textbook preparation was to enhance the ability of LEP parents to be involved in their children's education, and, when necessary, to be their advocate. This paper details some of the steps I went through in researching 1) the language of public school communications; 2) public school structure and programs; and 3) cultural differences in school practices which might hinder communication because of people's differing experiences and expectations.

## The Need for ESL Materials on the Public Schools

In 1983, I returned from two years in China to a classroom of Japanese and Korean housewives ensconced in New Jersey suburbs. Having just returned from what seemed like another planet, I just couldn't get the feel of what the real needs of my students were. One day, I asked them: "What do you want me to teach you? Where in your daily lives do you feel frustrated because of your limited English and knowledge of American life?" The immediate reply was, "Oh, teacher, please teach us how to talk at our children's schools." And thus this project was born.

When I later returned to the Adult Education Program in New York City, mixed in with Hispanic students were many barely educated Southeast Asians. My breaktimes were often spent attempting to explain to them the school letters they brought in. Sometimes I made multiple copies of the letters and used them as our text for that day. I'll never forget the day when Phal brought in a whole pile of her own letters and those she'd collected from her sisters. She plopped them down on my desk with: "Oh, Judy, when I got these letters, I was so mad. I just wanted to throw them into the garbage!" I suspected that many letters written in "schoolese" were every week thrown into the garbage by frustrated LEP parents. I felt that I just had to do something to unravel the "schoolese" which was blocking communication in those very same vehicles which schools use to communicate with the parents.

In addition to helping parents decipher letters from their children's schools, I found myself explaining the underlying school practices which surface in terms such as "SATs," "Individual Education Plan," " transitional ESL," "senior prom," "white elephant sale," "Chinese Auction" and "Senior Dress-Up Day." I began to see that a very rich subculture existed in the schools and that some of it was bewildering to foreign-born, and especially to LEP parents. I also began to realize that different school practices also block communication. Students bring their own school experiences with them. For instance, we are all aware that the stereotypical "oriental" student comes into our interactive classrooms expecting to sit quietly and write down everything that the teacher/expert says in her lectures. Parents also bring their expectations with them. For instance, a Japanese mother told me that her daughter's ESL teacher, in keeping with the current infatuation with parent involvement, invited her to a meeting at which she asked the parents for their feedback and input into her ESL program. But the Japanese are accustomed to leaving education to the experts at school. They rarely interact with the school, and if they do, they treat the teachers and their accumulated knowledge with the greatest of respect and would never dream of making a suggestion. The main function of the Parents' Association in Japan seems to

be giving a thank-you party for the teachers at the end of each school year! Thus the Japanese and Korean parents were puzzled as to why the ESL teacher had invited them to such a meeting ..and sat there in relative silence.

In my classroom, my lessons continued to develop. In October and March, I concentrated on preparing the parents for report card conferences. The last step in my procedure was the videotaping of our mock parent/teacher conferences. Then I attended an ODMAC chaired by Ros Vogel of La Guardia Community College, which introduced me to the parent involvement movement which was spreading around the country as the latest "quick fix" for the failure of our nation's schools to adequately educate our youth. At that conference I realized that LEP parents would be virtually left out of the parent involvement endeavor and that the frustration of school personnel in trying to communicate with them and bring them into the school community would increase.

### Gathering Other Data

From school publications I learned how the schools work and the language that they use in the many facets of their operations. I collected parent handbooks; student handbooks; report cards; form letters; thick, boring booklets explaining regulations governing special education and bilingual and ESL programs; invitations, notices and letters of all sorts; booklets describing the programs of study for college prep and vocational courses; explanations of special programs such as gifted, advanced placement, remedial and enriched; and many other materials. Teacher friends of mine around the country answered my request for similar material. I gathered other material in more affluent communities as well.

### From School Personnel

In order to obtain a deeper understanding of certain complicated school practices, such as the handling of discipline problems and the involvement of parents in the planning of the special education program for their children, I made appointments with some of the people whose names had appeared in the letters which my students had brought in. Several could see the need for the materials I was developing. I spoke with state, city and district administrators and with the Center for Research on Elementary and Secondary Schools. I also talked with principals, secretaries, nurses, Board of Education personnel, and teachers from numerous school districts. Most useful, however, were my visits with my students to their children's schools. I attended several report card conferences and recorded verbatim the exchanges between my students and their children's teachers. I was amused to find an example of how language changes with use. I found that teachers have changed 'homework' from a collective noun to a countable noun as in, "Your son still owes me three homeworks!" The terminology and phraseology data I collected became the basis for several lessons which would teach the language of report card conferences. From these conversations, I also became aware of those issues which concern parents and teachers and the language that they use to talk about them.

I also went to Back-to-School night and recorded the welcoming remarks of a principal and her outline of goals for the school year. At a school board meeting, I heard a report on a substance abuse/responsible behavior program in force at all school levels in the district. And at PTA meetings in New Jersey (where I live) and in the Bronx, I took notes on issues being discussed and the language used to discuss them. I also noticed that in the Bronx, although a large number of Hispanic parents were in attendance, none of the administrators spoke in Spanish. In New Jersey, three LEP parents attended, but they sat in patient silence and were ignored by those who ran the meeting.

### From Conference Participants

ESL teachers gave me many suggestions. When I gave presentations at local, state or national TESOL conferences, I always passed out small sheets of paper and asked my audience to write notes to me on anything that occurred to them during my talk, telling them that if I might contact them further, to give me their phone number. I particularly wanted to know what, from their experience, they felt needed to be explained to parents. I got some very on-target suggestions

and materials in this way. Thanks to those supportive teachers, I was able to obtain a list of 74 report card comments from Freeport High School on Long Island. I selected those comments which I felt LEP parents would most likely find on their children's report cards and used them in my lessons. I also obtained a packet of ten form letters prepared by a BOCES on Long Island. Each of these letters is available in numerous languages and thus the school need only select the letter and the language, make a copy, and send it to the appropriate LEP parents.

At a TESOL regional conference entitled, "Parents and Teachers Working Together," I heard an exchange of experience of foreign-born parents on how their children felt in American schools, and problems they had to deal with regarding their children's schooling. I interviewed a few of the mothers afterwards and learned more about struggles to guide children through identity crises, cultural clashes, and generational clashes. I also derived important information from presentations by foreign-born educators.

**From Foreign-Born Parents**

Compositions my students had written proved to be a good source for some sections of my book. For instance, when I excerpted from a pamphlet the description of a typical drug education program in a school system and used it for a reading lesson in one of the parent workbooks, in the teacher's guide I explained that attitudes toward drug use might differ among the parents in the classroom. As an illustration, I included segments of my students' compositions. In one a Laotian farmer said that he had paid his farmhands in opium as was the tradition there. In another, a Cambodian woman wrote that her father always put marijuana in the special dishes prepared for weddings and that everyone felt very happy the rest of the day! One morning a young mother shared with our class her decision to mainstream her children. A lively debate on bilingual education ensued, and this appears in my book as a conversation at a parent meeting.

Occasionally a parent consulted me on a school-related problem. I asked permission to take notes on our discussion and in that way collected the language the parent used, or that I used in prompting. From my notes I was able to write 1) a mock conversation between a counselor and a mother with a child in special education; 2) the account of a father who had his child transferred; and 3) a mother's conversation with a principal about a fight involving her son. To protect these parents and myself, I fictionalized names and combined several incidents so that the situations would not be recognizable.

I spent a very rewarding evening with several members of the Japanese Parents Association in Tenafly, New Jersey. They told me that as Japanese always plan to return to Japan, they live only the surface life in the United States. They aren't very interested in what is happening in the schools, but their children are living American life at a deeper dimension. Some family problems develop when parents on one hand encourage their children to learn English well as that is the key to their success in the United States, but later chastise them for having forgotten Japanese and having become too Americanized.

I attended a meeting of the Cultural Understanding and Prejudice Reduction Committee of students and school staff at Tenafly, a community which has attracted large numbers of Japanese, Koreans and Israelis. They are attempting to implement multicultural education both in and outside of the classroom. And I administered a questionnaire to solicit information on parents' experiences with and feelings about their children's schooling there. I interviewed parents and teachers from the Caribbean, Japan, China, Korea, the USSR, Macedonia and Iran.

**From Published Materials**

I gathered other language data and information on school issues from publications by Aspira, the Hispanic Policy Development Project, refugee organizations, The New York Times, The American Teacher, and New Jersey community newspapers. And from articles in educational journals, books and a doctoral dissertation on immigrant Portuguese students, I was able to write lessons for parents and background information in the teacher's guide on school-based

management, multicultural education, corporal punishment, child abuse and other current issues. And I was able to explain our teenage subculture by drawing heavily from Teenagers Talk about School by Elaine Landau, published by Prentice Hall.

From a video shown by Dr. Virginia Zanger at TESOL 1990, I wrote for my book, with permission, a conversation among troubled Hispanic teenagers about problems in school. And the PBS series "Crisis in Urban Education: The Disengaged," televised in the fall of 1989, provided me with background information on many education-related problems and how they are intertwined with America's social problems. In addition, I used information from a tapescript from a 1982 Oregon conference, detailing how some Southeast Asian refugee teenagers viewed American schools.

## Organizing the Data

My editor and I set up eleven units: Setting the Scene, Settling In, Arrangements, the School Day, Rules and Regulations, Extraschool Organization, Academics, the Schoolyear Calendar, Special Events, Social and Academic Problems, and Parental Involvement. New Reader's Press is now publishing two parent workbooks, a comprehensive teacher's guide, a glossary of school-related terminology with explanations and examples written in "special English," and a tape and transcript. Additional material will be published soon. Most of the language in the parent workbooks is from actual school letters, handbooks, programs of study, and my fieldnotes. The tape consists of speeches made by school administrators and conversations between parents and the school staff or between parents. The teacher's guide contains a wealth of cross-cultural information on school practices, problems of foreign-born and especially LEP students and parents, and explanations about school operations and the administration of federally-funded programs, as well as suggestions on how to teach each lesson.

## Conclusion

My research has only scratched the surface. To further develop this research, I would have to spend a great deal more time in ESL classrooms, parent interviews and meetings, and parent encounters with school personnel and publications. What I did find out, however, is that the language of public school communication cannot be taught without explanations about school practices which cannot be explained without also explaining the underpinnings of the school subculture and the variations in what is broadly referred to as American culture. And those who do the explaining can do so better with some understanding of the school practices, subculture, and expectations that foreign-born families bring with them to the United States.

# QUESTIONS, LECTURES, AND VIDEOTAPES: STYLES OF MALE AND FEMALE ESL TEACHERS

**Raimundo Mora, LaGuardia Community College**

Brophy's review (1985) of the literature on gender and teaching identifies student-centered teaching as a frequent characteristic of female teachers, and subject-centered discourse as a "male teaching style." Male teachers appear to do more lecturing, and female teachers to do more questioning. However, most of these studies reviewed made no attempt to actually describe the language used by the teachers.

In order to explore the specific components of teachers' speech styles and their actual performance and effect on classroom participation, I documented in fieldnotes and videotapes the language used by three teachers. For the purpose of this report, I will call them Joe, Janis, and Justine. All three are native-English speakers from the North Atlantic Seacoast of the United States, and hold graduate degrees in English. Although the specific focus of this report is their use of questions to conduct a class discussion, it also includes the use of lecture and silences. The findings reported here are part of a larger study about pragmatic aspects of the use of language in the classroom.

The ESL classes observed were offered by an urban community college in the program for limited English proficient students entering college. To document the language used in these classes, I videotaped class sessions on a regular basis throughout the term. I then arranged to watch the videotapes, first with the teacher, then with some students, and recorded their comments on a hand-held tape recorder. The speech acts performed in each event were identified by the speakers who performed them. This report focuses on three class discussions selected by both the teachers and the students for analysis. (Refer to table, next page.)

Justine used a higher percentage of questions than the other two teachers. She also used the highest percentage of personal questions. Joe was at the other end of the spectrum with the lowest percentage of total number of questions and personal questions. Janis fell in the middle.

Most of Justine's turns were single speech acts (mainly questions and commands) that she used to elicit information from students and to give them the floor. By contrast, Joe's performances were longer. For example, to open the discussion he performed eighteen speech acts. Then, he posed three questions in a row to the class as a whole. Janis lectured students twice during the class discussion: the first lecture consisted of eight and the second of forty seven speech acts. The fact that most of Justine's performances consisted of single speech acts meant that students had a higher percentage of turns than in the other two classes.

Table: Use of Questions

| | Justine | Joe | Janis |
|---|---|---|---|
| personal questions to elicit information | 38 (52.05%) | 2 (11.11%) | 14 (31.8%) |
| non-personal questions to elicit information | 33 (45.20%) | 14 (77.77%) | 2 (4.5%) |
| clarification questions | 2 (2.73%) | 2 (11.11%) | 17 (38.6%) |
| correction questions | 0 | 0 | 10 (27.7%) |
| total number of questions | 73 (100%) | 18 (100%) | 43 (100%) |
| percentage of questions over total number of speech acts in each event | (47.4%) | (37.6%) | (33.9%) |

When comparing the three classes, I saw that students had a greater opportunity to initiate interactions in Janis' class. Janis frequently remained silent at the end of the interactions. This gave students opportunities to initiate new interactions. This meant that students started asking questions or making statements without the teacher's participation. There were long silences in her event as a result of her waiting as long as necessary for students to answer her questions or initiate an interaction. Cazden (1988) reports a similar case of a teacher who, wanting to have a more natural interaction in her class, avoided eye contact with students in order to encourage them to interact with each other. In Justine's class, students spoke to each other in low voices. Student-to-student talk was not part of the official discourse. In Joe's class, students were not allowed to talk to each other.

Justine's and Joe's use of speech acts corresponds to characteristics attributed to their genders. For example, Justine used a higher percentage of questions than Joe, and the majority of her questions were personal. Further, her commands were indirect, while Joe's were direct. Joe used the lowest percentage of questions, and they were mainly display questions. Janis' use of language, on the other hand, comprises characteristics attributed to both genders. She used a higher proportion of questions than Joe, but like him, she tended to lecture in the class. This is an example of how teachers' psychological characteristics and ideological convictions might influence their styles. It is common knowledge that there are male and female ways of talking, but to assign the use of specific speech acts to each gender might be misleading.

In her data, Fishman (1980) finds that women used questions two-and-a-half times more frequently than men, but she challenges the association of women's frequent use of questions with powerless speakers. O'Barr and Atkins (1980) argue that certain characteristics of language use, such as women's frequent use of questions, have been confused with power issues because in the societies where gender studies have been conducted, women are usually less powerful than men. Rather than interpreting the use of questions as a sign of weakness, Fishman claims that in interactive terms, questions are stronger than statements, since they give the speaker the power to elicit a response. Justine's use of questions and her moves to take and give the floor exhibited more control over who speaks and when than either of the other two teachers.

Characteristics of language use attributed to both genders might be desirable for an optimal teaching performance. The greater participation of students in Justine's and Janis' events mean that the average student in their classes had a greater opportunity to have a "comprehensible input" than the average student in Joe's class. According to the Comprehensible Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985), testing one's linguistic production against other speakers' is necessary for language acquisition. On the other hand, Joe encouraged the few students who participated in his discussion to develop their ideas into a longer discourse, and express them according to rhetorical norms expected from them in their writings. If oral participation in class does indeed help students to develop academic skills, then students who did not speak in Janis' and Joe's classes might have needed more support, such as the system of scaffolds offered by Justine, to make the transition to a mainstream American college class. These students may also have needed practice at putting together an articulate discourse according to American academic standards. A style that better meets these students' needs might be one in which teachers adopt different styles to balance demand and support, promote natural interaction, and help students develop an academic discourse.

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*RESEARCH ON ASSESSMENT*

# THE ESL PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT EXPERIMENT at BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

**Linda Markstein, Gay Brookes, Alberta Grossman, Pat Chernoff, Tracey Forrest, Ken Levinson, Raimundo Mora, Susan Price and Elizabeth Upton**

**Borough of Manhattan Community College**

In Spring 1991, the ESL faculty of Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) began an experiment in portfolio assessment. Ten teachers representing all four levels (ESL 054 through ESL 084) and ten classes (more than 200 students) participated in the experiment during the spring semester; now, in the fall semester, we have 19 teachers, 19 classes, and more than 400 students involved.

We began our portfolio experiment because we no longer had full confidence in the validity of assessment via a single-shot, 50-minute writing test such as the CUNY Writing Assessment Test (WAT) and our department ESL exam, which is modeled after the WAT. We wanted a curriculum-integrated assessment that would match and enhance our process-oriented curriculum; additionally, we wanted an assessment system that would fully involve both teachers and students in the assessment process.

## Description of the Portfolios

In our pilot project, we asked students to put together portfolios of their best work over the course of the term. These portfolios consisted of four pieces, plus a cover letter: The cover letter explained the portfolio choices, why the writer had chosen those pieces, what they represented for the writer, and more. One in-class writing was included, which had to be completed within a single class period with no collaboration; students selected their best in-class writing from several in-class writings. Also included were three revised pieces -- one of which had to have all drafts attached. Diversity of genre was a criterion for the upper levels but not for the lowest levels. Students selected the pieces for their portfolios, usually in partial collaboration with their teacher and/or classmates.

## Evaluation of the Portfolios

We had holistic portfolio reading sessions with norming to establish common standards at both midterm and final time. Each portfolio was read and independently scored according to a criteria sheet by two evaluators, one of whom was the classroom teacher. Feedback was provided to the student via the criteria sheet at midterm time. At final time, evaluators had a 93 percent inter-rater agreement rate. Students at the highest ESL level (084) also took the WAT. The portfolio pass rate was approximately 50 percent higher than the WAT pass rate. Some teachers stated in their portfolio project reports that they felt more confident of the portfolio passes than of the WAT passes because the portfolios sampled a wider range of writing skills and gave a more complete picture of the students' writing capabilities.

## Advantages of Portfolio Assessment

In our portfolio committee meetings, teachers stated repeatedly that portfolio assessment influenced day-to-day instruction and the learning environment of the classroom in a number of positive and exciting ways. Students in portfolio classes came to believe in the value and importance of revision, something they might not have realized in non-portfolio classes where they were evaluated on a single-shot, 50-minute essay.

Additionally, students did a great deal of writing in portfolio classes, and they became writerly in their perceptions and habits as they revised and selected their portfolio pieces. Teachers at the lower ESL levels reported that portfolios promoted the development of oral skills as well as reading/writing skills because students voluntarily engaged in discussions about their writing with both their teachers and their classmates. We all noted what seemed to be strong personal involvement and connection which our students felt with their writing and the pride with which they assembled their portfolios. Finally, highly test-anxious students were freed of their personal nightmare of the time-constrained WAT, and they could concentrate on developing their writing skills in a positive, relaxed environment.

## Problems and Issues Raised by Portfolios

We did, however, face problems in our experiment, some anticipated and some not. Along with the excitement of collaborative teacher/student involvement in assessment came the frustration and disappointment among both teachers and students over failing portfolios. Not all students were ready to pass even though they seemed to work hard all semester and do their best work, and we were left with unresolved questions about how to motivate these students to continue in what, for them, must be a longer quest.

Secondly, changing the nature of instruction/assessment, and as a result the classroom environment, may be stimulating and exciting, but portfolio assessment is also quite time-consuming. As students produced more and more writing, teachers had to respond in some way to an ever-increasing volume. Many of the teachers in the experiment believe that, ideally, students should attach all drafts to all revised pieces in the portfolio, rather than to only one, so that the evaluators could assess authorship as well as the quality and type of revisions the students are making. However, this might add greatly and perhaps unrealistically to what is already a time-consuming evaluation process.

Another conflict we have is whether the emphasis on process in our portfolio experiment may be excessive, particularly at the lower levels. And we are confronting the odd question of whether curriculum and assessment may now be too integrated rather than too separated. Thus, our experiment has introduced us to a new realm of questions and uncertainties.

## Conclusions

William Cory once remarked that students go to college to learn habits. We believe our students are learning valuable habits in our portfolio experiment: the habit of revising, the habit of reflecting thoughtfully on their work and submitting their work for review and criticism among others.

Finally, although we may feel overwhelmed and under-resourced in our unfunded experiment, we believe that our portfolio experiment has validated us as teachers and our students as learners. We are excited by the new and sometimes mysterious spaces that have opened for all of us in our classrooms.

# STUDENT BIAS IN TEACHER EVALUATIONS

Nancy Erber, LaGuardia Community College

In most educational institutions, teachers are evaluated by a variety of methods. In 1989-1990 I conducted a survey with two colleagues at LaGuardia Community College regarding teacher evaluation. After interviewing approximately 75 ESL program administrators and instructors in the New York metropolitan area, we found that peer assessment of classroom performance, conducted through class visits by an observer and questionnaires distributed to students at some point during the school term, are among the most prevalent. We also found that both administrators and instructors had numerous questions and reservations about the validity of prevailing methods of teacher assessment, as well as some suggestions for change. In this paper, I will focus on student assessment of ESL college-level instructors.

All the supervisors (program coordinators, department chairs or directors) who responded to our survey affirmed that peer and student assessment played significant roles in the annual or semi-annual evaluations which they prepared for their instructional staff, which generally included both full and part-time teachers. Peer and student assessment, they stated, provided crucial information on teachers' classroom performance and supplemented the supervisors' personal knowledge, which was usually acquired through classroom visits and/or conferencing with instructors. Most importantly, peer and student evaluations provided a view of the faculty from multiple perspectives. We also found that in the New York metropolitan area, many of the steps in an evaluation process in college-level ESL programs are regulated by uniform procedures. This is because of the size of educational institutions and a desire by college administrations to ensure uniform standards of performance across departments and disciplines. In some cases, the steps and timing of the process are also stipulated by collective bargaining agreements.[1]

ESL college or college preparatory programs were the focus of this survey, and my colleagues and I found that because of the size of most institutions in which ESL programs in higher education are housed and the numerical insufficiency of administrative personnel (supervising a large adjunct staff single-handedly was a common complaint), ESL administrators as a group reported that they were often forced to delegate personal assessment and the judgment process to others; in many cases, peers, such as adjunct instructors, performed classroom visits and submitted evaluations of other senior adjuncts to a program administrator while s/he focused on newly-hired and more junior instructors. Similarly, supervisors said that they were dependent to a significant extent on standardized procedures for collecting and analyzing data that influenced important personnel decisions, even when they would have preferred more direct and personalized assessment tools; student evaluations were frequently cited in this respect. In may cases, standardized assessment forms designed for native speakers of English were distributed to ESL students, because of college-wide procedures.[2] These machine-scored forms were subjected to quantitative analysis by the college's personnel department and the ESL instructors were rated according to a college-wide mean.

How effective and accurate is this process? Teacher evaluation instruments and procedures and student reactions to them are fruitful areas for classroom-based research. ESL instructors in our survey reported that the feedback they received from standardized forms of student evaluation was often incongruous, contradictory and difficult to interpret. At the same time, instructors who objected to this form of assessment expressed a desire to receive student feedback and use it to tailor their courses to student expectations and needs. Therefore, it is important to note that these ESL specialists saw a need for multiple assessment measures, but found that some of the instruments currently in use were inadequate for this purpose. Instructors

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1 See for example the PSC-CUNY collective bargaining agreement.

2 Survey respondents cited a 40-question machine-scored form which was filled out by ESL students in a 20-minute period.

voiced considerable frustration regarding commercially-produced teacher assessment packages which were designed for native English speakers. Several gave examples of how survey results conflicted with their own perceptions of their practice. For example, a teacher who says that s/he faithfully assigned adequate amounts of homework was informed by tabulated survey results that a majority of students believed little or no homework had been given in the class. An instructor who claims to have arrived at every class with stacks of handouts and a lesson plan learned that students felt s/he did little or no preparation for the course. How are these results to be interpreted?

Surveying the perceptions of limited English-speaking students presents a special challenge to educational institutions. First of all, the possibility that key lexical items in student questionnaires will be misunderstood by a limited English-speaking student population must be addressed. The use of the words "too" and "very" was cited by our survey respondents as a pitfall in one popular standardized form since the negative connotation of "too" is not often recognized by beginner and intermediate ESL students. Similarly, the word "lecture," which is used on a commercially produced form, may be misinterpreted by students from a Spanish language background because it appears to be a cognate of "lectura" (reading material). Some ESL administrators have addressed this problem by creating and distributing translations of teacher assessment forms in students' native languages, which are, in turn, tabulated by native speakers.[3] However, this solution to the problem of lexical misconstruction is not available to all administrators since it is both time-consuming and costly.

Cultural factors also enter into the interpretation of all sorts of written material, and student questionnaires are no exception. Machine-scored forms which use a variant of the multiple choice format have rating scales that may be interpreted differently by students from different ethnic or national backgrounds. Both word-based and numerical rating systems are open to misinterpretation. For example, a word-based scale that has a range from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" may pose difficulties for non-native and native English speakers alike when negative questions or prompts are used, making it unclear to some readers whether the desired answer is "Yes, I agree that the teacher did not..." or "No, I think the teacher did...." This syntactic dilemma is related to the lexical difficulties cited above. On the other hand, if numbers are used in a rating scale, difficulties may still arise for students unfamiliar with the system. For example, ESL students who are accustomed to using the number one as an synonym for "excellent" (or who become familiar with the concept in American English usage), may misapply a rating scale of one to ten, if instructions indicating that ten is the top score are not read or remembered when the student is grappling with the lexical complexities of the questionnaire. Similarly, misprisions may be caused by affective responses evoked by the perhaps novel experience of rating the teacher. And it should not be forgotten that the technical demands posed by machine scorable answer sheets and the time constraints imposed on students to fill them out may also affect their performance.

Finally, as test designers have long been aware, the physical layout of a rating scale on the printed page is culturally determined. Values may be unconsciously communicated or miscommunicated by the layout. Are the choices on the scale arranged in a left to right sequence, with left being the most positive, highest or strongest agreement? Or is the highest, strongest or most positive alternative on the right? The format itself may have a subtle effect on responses and provoke a significant amount of confusion.

In addition to cultural factors of the types mentioned above, other variables are known to influence students' responses in teacher evaluations. Much research has been done in the past two decades on the influence of gender--both the teachers' and the students'-- as a source of bias in students' assessments (see Martin, 1984). However, neither the special features of the ESL student population nor other important factors such as race, age and ability in the mainstream student cohort have been as extensively examined. Still, these studies do have aspects which make them interesting and relevant for ESL specialists, in particular, because despite their

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[3] The Day Intensive Program of the English Language Center at LaGuardia Community College used this method.

limitations they do suggest, as our survey respondents did, that assessment tools tell either more, less or other than what they purport to measure. The chief conclusions of the research which I have examined are the following: (1) that students rate teachers according to culturally constructed stereotypes and expectations; and (2) that women teachers are held to those expectations more strictly than are men. For example, Elmore et al. (1975) have shown that students' perception of "warmth" (friendliness, approachability, compassion) in a teacher strongly influences their ratings and is a positive factor; this was the case for both the male and female college professors in the study. However, Martin's study (1984) indicated that only female instructors were expected to exhibit this characteristic. Women who were perceived by their students as "efficient" and "business-like" received lower ratings than their brusque and no-nonsense male colleagues since, according to the students, this was normal behavior and thus did not detract from their performance. Women were expected to smile more frequently and have more sustained eye contact with students than men.

In addition to gender role stereotypes and expectations, there are other affective factors which influence students' assessments. Martin (1984) has shown that the grade a student expects to receive in a course affects the evaluation. Therefore, an educational institution which administers student evaluations immediately after midterm exam week, as my college does, may get a different reading on an instructor's performance than one which distributes them at other times in the academic year. In a cross-cultural context, it is also worth noting that the idea of students rating an instructor is not one with which all foreign students will be comfortable. Student anonymity has also raised questions about the validity of student evaluation statistics. Recently, an arbitrator in a U.S. university system ruled in favor of a faculty member in a grievance hearing by affirming that anonymous documents like student evaluations must not be used in personnel decisions. The chair of the faculty union chapter at the University of Guam, representing the faculty member, had argued that "anonymous evaluations encourage irresponsibility and contribute to several current problems in higher education, including grade inflation..." (On Campus, 1990).

While student evaluations are not responsible for all the ills plaguing modern universities, it is clear that teacher assessment is an important and multi-faceted process, and one which plays a significant role in the quality of educational life and the careers of college faculty. Further, it is evident that in dealing with a particular population, such as ESL students, cultural and linguistic factors must be taken into account. While I cannot propose a global and immediate solution to the complex problem of teacher assessment, I will propose some guidelines for evaluating the effectiveness of current modes of assessment. The following are questions administrators should ask about their institutions' evaluation procedures: Are ESL students provided with adequate time to read and fill out questionnaires? Are dictionaries permitted or provided? Are students familiar with the purposes of teacher evaluation? Is a simplified English version needed? A translation? Is the rating system clear? Are the instructions clear? Do students understand how to fill out machine-scored answer sheets? Do students have objections, questions or fears about teacher evaluation? Is the information collected from evaluations useful to students? To teachers? Is it accessible to students? To teachers? Will the results of the current evaluation process lead to improvements in educational quality? Will it affect the "fit" between students and teachers in a positive manner?

A study conducted by two university psychologists concluded that when students rate their instructors, they summon up a mental picture of an "ideal teacher" and are not, in fact, comparing Professor X to Dr. Y or vice versa (Grasha, 1975). Therefore, it is important to remember that although evaluation instruments may be refined to eliminate possible sources of linguistic confusion, this will not necessarily eliminate all the pitfalls inherent in the evaluation process. If the notion of the "ideal teacher" has validity, we must take into account that the "ideal teacher" for an elderly man from the People's Republic of China may not be the same for a young woman from Peru. And, just as we in the TESOL profession respect diversity among our students, we must demand that the evaluation instruments and procedures used to assess teachers' performance acknowledge and respect our differences.

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***PAPERS FROM THE AFTERNOON PLENARY SESSION:***

# RESEARCH ON CCNY'S FLUENCY-FIRST APPROACH TO ESL

## Introduction

**Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly, CCNY**

The Fluency-First approach used in our 3-level ESL writing course sequence at CCNY is a whole-language approach, incorporating process writing, and on the first two levels, the writing of sustained projects of 10,000 words or more, the reading of 1,000 pages of popular fiction, and group work on writing projects and readings. There is no formal grammar instruction on the first two levels: students' work is evaluated on the basis of fluency in the first course and clarity in the second. Fluency entails comprehensibility, completeness, logical progression of ideas in narrative and descriptive writing, and evidence of growing control over the mechanics of writing. Clarity entails all of the fluency criteria, as well as making logical connections between paragraphs, having a discernible beginning and ending, having no gaps or unnecessary material, accomplishing the purpose(s) of the piece, and good control over the mechanics of writing.

Lester and Onore (1991) offer a more general and inclusive definition of fluency, clarity and correctness:

> Fluency might be described as comfort with language and the ability of learners to say what they wish to say in talk or writing. Clarity moves learners from writing mostly for themselves to considering an audience and explicit purpose for the writing or talking. Here language is shaped in order to share. Correctness and evaluation involve everything from the cosmetic aspects of texts to writers' or speakers' assessments of their own and others' work. It involves more public sharing of language and has the goal of ensuring that the text can stand on its own. (p. 47)

In our first-level fluency course, students usually write lengthy narratives, such as autobiographies, novels, magazines, first-hand accounts of wars, etc. In the clarity course, students focus on academic writing, as they work on progressively more demanding pieces of their projects, ending with a term paper, an article for publication, or an action plan for change. And in the last course, students work on editing, aiming for correctness, and on advancing their academic writing and reading skills by working with a college-level cultural anthropology text.

The following papers represent a small part of the ongoing research on the Fluency-First approach, and the first three papers were part of the afternoon plenary presentations by CCNY faculty. The approach naturally engenders a considerable amount of teacher research, as teachers implement it, share their insights and findings with other teachers, interact with students, help peer groups to help each other, respond to writing, and otherwise help students with their individual writing projects and understand and appreciate the books that they are reading. The piece by Branham describes ESL classroom-based research to improve learning and her own learning about learning. Moreno's piece tells of her work with bilingual teachers to improve their own and their students' learning through whole language activities--work that was based on her training and experimentations at CCNY. And Tillyer's piece analyzes data on a sample of 3,000 students, comparing the success rates in passing the Writing Assessment Test (WAT) and English 110 (the college-wide English composition requirement) of pre- and post- Fluency-First students.

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# WITH BOTH HANDS: A PROTECTOR OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE EXPERIMENTS WITH WHOLE LANGUAGE

**Sheryl Branham, CCNY**

When colleagues in my department first began talking about the teacher as learner in the classroom environment, I thought it a contradiction in terms. In my personal experience, teachers taught and students learned. As a college student, I sat before my professors listening attentively and dutifully taking notes. Occasionally I'd ask a question; my participation in the learning environment of the classroom was pretty much limited to that. When I became an English teacher, I modeled myself on my professors. I stood behind a lectern and lectured. I sprinkled my lectures with dry humor. To that extent, I was also an entertainer. When it came time to evaluate my students, I gave exams, careful to include tricky questions so that the A students could feel justifiably superior. My classroom experience had taught me that teaching and learning comprised a simplistic game of intellectual display: teachers displayed their knowledge and the students displayed how well they had grasped that knowledge.

I had problems, however, when first teaching ESL. Very few, if any, could correctly answer my tricky exam questions, and my humor went unappreciated. Correcting my students was a constant battle. It took hours to correct every single mistake and write brief explanations as to why the wording was unclear on each and every student paper. And their papers bored me. Like many of my colleagues at that time, I complained about the quality of my students and the difficulty of my task. I wouldn't have admitted it then, but I probably believed that an ESL teacher's main objective was to protect the English language from any foreign invasion. The English teachers were obviously losing the battle, and I was ready to give up.

This in brief was the sort of teacher I was before introduced to Adele MacGowan's and Betsy Rorschach's whole language methods of teaching. Others who had begun to use their approach were very enthusiastic about the results. They read each other's student papers with enthusiasm. I figured something was up and, as I was bored with myself as a teacher, I volunteered to pilot the approach in my class. Some of their ideas I immediately took to. They required students to write lengthy projects and read a number of real books. I thought this was an excellent idea, since the only way to really learn a language quickly is to immerse oneself in real language. They also talked about responding to students' writing as an interested reader, and not a corrector. This took a semester or more to learn. My responses at the beginning looked no different from my earlier cross-outs and obliterations of student texts. Gradually, however, I did respond as an interested listener, and students' revisions improved as a result.

But what was extremely difficult to learn was giving up my safe position behind the lectern. I was asked to put my students in groups, step back and observe the learning taking place within the groups, then eventually participating in the groups, but as a member like any other. I doubted this would work. Wouldn't students just learn each other's mistakes? But when I stepped back to observe group interactions, I learned that my students were not blind. Together, they formed a pretty hefty English dictionary and a fairly complete grammar. They were able to navigate through some pretty mean texts. But what is more, I learned my students had wide backgrounds and a wealth of cultural, experiential, and specialized knowledge. Their responses to readings became interesting and illuminating to each other and to me. I began to join the groups to learn from the students. They engaged my curiosity, my desire to learn. I asked as many questions as other members of the group, and laughed as loudly at their humor. They taught me that this is, in part, what it means to respond.

Instead of writing on their papers that certain passages were vague or poorly developed, I began to ask questions: How did your friend react when this was happening? How did you feel?

What did the man who took your wallet in the subway look like? Did anyone help you out? Would you react differently if you could re-do the experience? I was no longer concerned with battling mistakes, but understanding what my students had to say. Responding shifted focus away from correctness to content, to an expression of ideas--the most important task of writing--and this, much to my surprise, was something my students could do quite successfully. Because the focus was on expression or content, my students became engaged in their writing. At the end of the semester, they didn't throw their final projects on the desk, glad the odious task of writing a paper was over with! They handed them to me with both hands, smiling, proud of their work.

Teaching became learning, and not just the learning of how to teach. I learned from my students many other things as well. My class became a place where each of us shared our knowledge. I was no longer the only teacher. My students were not the only learners. The English language did not need protection. It was used extensively inside the classroom, by everyone, not just the native speaker. I was freed from having to know all the answers or coming up with the best answers or interpretations of a text. All of us had valuable interpretations, all of us made meaning out of the texts we read and wrote. By stepping away from behind the lectern and joining the learning environment of the groups, I could become, along with my students, what in fact each one of us is: one voice among many.

# TEACHER TRAINING IN THE FLUENCY-FIRST APPROACH AT THE N.Y.C. BOARD OF EDUCATION

**Adelaide L. Moreno, City College**

Recently I ran five workshops sponsored by the High School Bilingual/ESL Office, entitled , "The Holistic Approach to Writing." My group of sixteen participants consisted of ESL teachers, native language arts teachers (Chinese, French, Korean, Spanish), special education (emotionally disturbed, gifted, handicapped) teachers, foreign language teachers, bilingual math and social studies teachers, teachers of English and Spanish literature, and math/science teachers. They had been teaching for an average of 2 years. I called Adele MacGowan before the first workshop and asked for advice. She said to simply explain the basics, reassure them about their doubts, and then put them into the process themselves. She helped me a little with the theory, and wished me luck.

At workshop #1, I described the Fluency First approach, the research done on it at CCNY, and the principles behind it, and suggested that the teachers present could all experiment with it in their classes. Here is a sample of the responses I got:

"My students can barely read primary texts."
"My students have been diagnosed as learning disabled, dyslexic, or retarded."
"My students can't write; they don't know grammar."
"I have too many different levels of language proficiency in my classes."
"My students can't write paragraphs."
"I can't be helped; nothing works with my students."
"You can't expect the same from my students; they've never read a whole book."
"Students in my class never show up with a pencil."
"My students have no interest in academics. They come from deprived homes."
"How am I going to do this? I teach science."
"I think you are a bit unrealistic, Ms. Moreno. You teach in college; we are high school teachers of students with very, very special needs."

After listening calmly to their protests, I reassured them that I understood their concerns. I told them about the many problems my beginning college students had: they couldn't read much, many wrote like second graders, and their grammar was poor. Then I asked the teachers to be patient with me for the remainder of the workshop, because we would be doing something they would enjoy, and at the end, they could make up their own minds.

I then put the teachers in triads, gave them a first piece of in-class writing of a Bronx Community College student and of a City College student, and then showed them the same student's final writing projects. After looking over the before and after pieces, the teachers talked in their small groups about the vast improvements they saw. After this, I challenged them to try out the process on themselves. I asked each one to read a book and write a whole book, and they reluctantly promised they would try. First, I invited them to come up to a table at the front of the room where I had placed a large selection of best sellers for them to choose from. The majority proceeded to the front of the room.

As they browsed, one woman stood up, picked up her handbag, and said that she couldn't be helped, that nothing would work with her kids, and the woman left the room. After she left, another teacher said, "You see, many of us have not been appointed and we are afraid of losing our jobs -- our job frustration is often passed on to our students." Others explained how it keeps them from even wanting to try new things.

Meanwhile, I observed that two women didn't even pay attention to what was being said, because they were already so engrossed in reading their books. I asked them all to read for a while, and gave them enough time to read several pages. Then I asked them to get into small groups and tell each other what the book was about so far and how they liked it. If they didn't like it, I urged them to choose another and browse through it to make sure it was appealing to them. Meanwhile, some continued to chat; others read. After another ten minutes or so, I asked them to read on for the next workshop, when they would discuss their books with their groups. I asked them to make some notations -- things to quote to the group, questions to ask them, reasons why they liked/disliked something -- and to underline what they liked, because this would help them discuss the book later on.

Then it was time to write. "I don't write much in English," said one. "I don't either," said another, " and English is my native language!" Over their protests, I passed out some paper and asked them to simply write what they were feeling at that moment, and to write for five minutes, to which they all complied. I then said, "Would anyone like to share what you wrote?" And a couple of teachers read their pieces, apparently happy to do so. They nodded in commiseration with the readers as they read of their qualms about writing and negative experiences with it. When I said that I wasn't going to collect it, a few seemed relieved.

Next, I asked them to write for ten minutes non-stop, and suggested several possibilities: how their parents met, what their family meant to them, how they felt about teaching, and more. They wrote intently for the time period. Again I asked some teachers to read their pieces to the group, which they did. The level of enjoyment and excitement was heightening as various participants read their pieces. Listeners responded with questions, laughter, applause, or sympathy. But the engagement level was very high.

With just a little time left, I invited them to consider that piece a chapter in their life stories, or in a collection of stories by them, to eventually be part of a book they'd write. They all liked the idea. I also invited them to try just one of the activities I had suggested with their classes by the next workshop. I explained how the content area teachers could try writing to learn, or having students pose the questions of the lesson, or having students work collaboratively to learn something, rather than the typical question-and-answer sessions they were accustomed to leading. They all promised to do something.

At the second workshop, the teachers were very excited. They first worked in groups on the books they were reading and the ones they were writing. They then reported on what they had done in their classes. Some went all the way and converted their classes into workshops, asking their students to read real books and write a book. Others used some whole-language activities. They had many questions about implementation: organization, grouping, evaluating, the changed role of the teacher, and more. I answered as best I could, and some of the teachers answered each other.

By the third workshop, several weeks into the approach, the teachers' reports were glowing. They treated me like a genius. Their students' attitudes toward writing had changed. Once they understood that writing was not a test, and once the fear of failure was behind them, they were more responsible, confident, excited about learning, and productive. They were proud to show what they knew and everything they were learning and experiencing in class. They demonstrated more discipline as they worked with higher concentration and effort. They asked the teacher and each other for more help. They worked well alone and collaboratively. By listening to, reading, and responding to each other's pieces, they appreciated each other more. And they began to tell the teacher what they wanted and needed in the way of help. Further, because they could choose their own topics, they tended to finish more pieces. And they both wanted to write and spent longer periods of time working on a piece. The students themselves were reporting that they were writing the best stuff they'd ever written.

In their reading groups, students talked more and reported that this helped them understand more. The students wanted more uninterrupted blocks of time to read, saying they needed silence in order to think. For many students, the book they read for the course was the first whole book they had ever read. The teachers had given them a lot of books to choose from, and the students enjoyed browsing and selecting their own books. The teachers read to the students at times, and they read to each other the parts of the books they really liked or the parts that were confusing, so that others could enjoy them too or just respond.

The teachers agreed that what they had learned in the workshops -- learned by doing -- worked in their courses. They said that if they believed in the system, it would work. But if they only tried some activities half-heartedly, it wouldn't. They also said they had changed their expectations for their students, now expecting much more from them. They commented on their surprise at the rich experiences their students had to draw from. They also talked of the need to be more sensitive and understanding as students composed. "I've been shortchanging students for years," said one participant. "Now I have a new attitude toward teaching and toward my students. Attitude is what makes this approach work."

# BEFORE AND AFTER SUCCESS RATES ON THE FLUENCY-FIRST APPROACH TO ESL

**Anthea Tillyer, City College**

Notwithstanding the almost messianic zeal with which teachers talk about the whole-language , Fluency-First approach they're using at CCNY, we do not rely solely on qualitative research to understand why it is so effective: we have been doing our statistical research as well. We have tracked the progress of approximately three thousand ESL students from their entrance to their exit from ESL 30, the last course in the ESL program, as well as in English 110, the college's required English Composition course.

We selected certain years as "markers" for purposes of comparison: 1983, 1986, 1989, and 1990 (spring and fall for all four years). The Fluency-First approach had been implemented in ESL 10, our first course, in the fall of 1987, and in ESL 20, the second course, in the spring of 1988. Thus data from the first two marker years, 1983 and 1986, were compared with data from two years when the approach was in full swing, 1989 and 1990. Aside from implementing the Fluency-First approach, we implemented changes in our procedures for placement in the ESL sequence: we started placing students in ESL 10 if their writing was not fluent, and not on the basis of the English faculty's numerical rankings, which were largely decided by the level of correctness in a student's writing sample. We also began taking reading placement test scores into consideration when placing students in writing courses.

As can be seen in the table below, students now take fewer remedial English courses. We speculate that this is because students are becoming fluent writers and readers, and more sure of themselves in English, before they have to worry about correctness. This finding is significant and has far-reaching implications, especially now when there is heavy pressure within the University to penalize students who fail the same remedial level twice.

Table

Success rates of ESL students before and after the Fluency-First approach. (n = 3000)

| | 1983 | 1986 | 1989 | 1990 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Av. # remedial Eng. courses | 2.7 | 2.6 | 2.0 | 1.7 |
| 2. Times taking English 110 | 2.8 | 2.5 | 2.0 | 1.6 |
| 3. % passing Eng. 110 first time | 58% | 60% | 75% | 83% |

We also looked at the results gained by our students when they left the ESL sequence and entered the "real world" of freshman comp., English 110. As can be seen in the table (items 2 and 3), the average number of times ESL students needed to take English 110 in 1983 was 2.8; by 1990 it was 1.6. In 1983, only 58% of our students who took English 110 passed it the first time. But of our students who exited ESL 30 in 1990 (spring or fall), 83% passed English 110 the first time they took it. So even though they are being placed lower in the ESL sequence, they end up taking fewer remedial English courses and yet do better when they leave our program and go into English 110.

We are also looking at the reasons for failure among those students who have been in the sequence since we started using a whole-language approach. One of our findings is that among students who were "skipped" by teachers or counselors from ESL 10 to ESL 30 (bypassing ESL 20), there is a failure rate in ESL 30 of 83%. (In ESL 20, students bridge over from informal, expressive and narrative writing into academic writing, and from reading fiction to reading academic material. And as in ESL 10, they read a thousand pages and write a ten-thousand word project.) This finding has very definite implications for not skipping what seem to be advanced ESL 10 students into ESL 30.

It is clear to us using the Fluency-First approach that placement and promotion must be based on the achievement of fluency and clarity in ESL 10 and 20 respectively, and not on grammatical knowledge. ESL 10, the level where students strive for fluency in writing and reading, cannot be thought of as a low or beginning course; nor can ESL 20 be thought of as one for students of intermediate rather than advanced ability in English. A course that does not break language up into discrete parts, but presents and uses it wholly, and is as demanding as ESL 10 or 20, helps ESL students to learn far more language, and become more correct, than a grammar-intensive "advanced" course.

# EFFECTS OF THE FLUENCY-FIRST APPROACH AND INITIAL PLACEMENT ON PERFORMANCE IN ADVANCED ESL

Carole Riedler-Berger, City College

The Fluency-First project at CCNY is a three-course instructional program designed to maximize English proficiency and reduce attrition among students registered for ESL courses. The whole-language curriculum gives students a great degree of control, autonomy and involvement by way of self-paced, problem-solving learning projects of much greater length than is typical in ESL. The curriculum focuses on three stages of writing competency: fluency (ESL 10), clarity (ESL 20), and correctness (ESL 30). The new curricula for ESL 10, 20 and 30 were introduced in Fall '87, Spring '88, and Fall '88, respectively.

Data: 816 enrollments in ESL 30 from Spring '88 through Spring '89 were examined. All data regard the ESL 30 performance (end of semester status) of students who: (a) completed ESL 30 with no repeats during the ESL sequence; or (b) completed ESL 30 with repeat(s) during the ESL sequence; or (c) failed ESL 30.

Definitions.:
Semester: Spring '88 (S 88), Fall '88 (F 88), Spring '89 (S 89).
Initial ESL placement level: ESL 10, ESL 20, or ESL 30.
Pilot vs. Non-pilot: Had fluency-first class or did not. All S 88 enrollments in ESL 30 were non-pilot ($n = 258$). As pilot courses were phased in, the F 88 non-pilot $n$ was 72 and the S89 non-pilot $n$ was 20.

The data were used to address the following questions:

1. Did ESL 30 performance of the total enrollment differ by semester?
2. Did ESL 30 performance across the three semesters differ by placement group?
3. Did ESL 30 performance of total enrollment and of each of the placement groups across the three semesters differ by pilot and non-pilot group?

Chi-square tests of homogeneity were used to compare ESL performance of various groupings. Results reported here achieved statistical significance with a probability of less than .05. [1]

As to question 1, the proportion of enrollments completing without repeats in S 89 (39%) was greater than in S 88 (26%). The proportion of enrollments failing in S 89 (36%) was smaller than in S 88 (55%).

With respect to question 2, overall performance across the three semesters by placement groups, the ESL 30 and the ESL 20 groups had greater proportions of enrollments completing the sequence with no repeats (43% and 36%) than did the ESL 10 group (17%). The ESL 30 group had a smaller proportion of enrollments completing with repeats (14%) than did the ESL 10 group (27%). The ESL 30 and ESL 20 groups had smaller proportions of enrollments failing (43% and 45%) than did the ESL 10 group (57%).

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[1] Missing statistics and tables, omitted due to space constraints, are available from the author.

**Table**

Chi square test of homogeneity of total population performance by three semesters.

| | S88 | F88 | S89 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Completed without repeat | 67 (26.0%) | 93 (30.3) | 99 (39.4) | 259 (31.7) |
| Completed with repeat(s) | 50 (19.4) | 52 (16.9) | 62 (24.7) | 164 (20.1) |
| Failed | 141 (54.7) | 162 (52.8) | 90 (35.9) | 393 (49.2) |
| Total | 258 (100.0) | 307 (100.0) | 251 (100.0) | 816 (100%) |

In response to question 3, regarding the total enrollment across the three semesters, the pilot group had a greater proportion of enrollments completing with no repeats (40%) than did the non-pilot group (20%). The pilot group had a smaller proportion of enrollments completing with repeats (16%) than did the non-pilot group (25%). The pilot group had a smaller proportion of enrollments failing than did the non-pilot group (55%).

For the ESL 10 placement group, the pilot group had a greater proportion of enrollments completing with no repeats (27%) than did the non-pilot group (7%). Pilot and non-pilot groups did not differ on completing with repeats and on failures.

For the ESL 20 placement group, the pilot group had a greater proportion of enrollments completing with no repeats (45%) than did the non-pilot group (25%). The pilot group had a marginally smaller proportion of enrollments completing with repeats (15%) than did the non-pilot group (24%). The pilot group had a marginally smaller proportion of enrollments failing (40%) than did the non-pilot group (51%). In the ESL 30 group, there was no significant difference between pilot and non-pilot group performance.

## Discussion

Notwithstanding the use of enrollments rather than students as units, there seems to have been an approximate decrease of 18% in ESL 30 failures between S 88 and S 89, from 55% to 36%. In overall performance, the ESL 10 placement group had 57% ESL 30 failures, approximately 14% more than the other two placement groups. However, this group's passing rate in ESL 30 was 9% higher than for non-pilot placements (61% vs. 52%). There was a 12% higher failure rate of non-pilot groups across the three placement groups. There was a 12% lower failure rate in ESL 30 for pilot than for non-pilot placements. And the ESL 30 placement group failure rate was constant at 43% across semesters.

Course completions without repeats for the total enrollment increased from 26% in S 88 to 39% in S 89. For the pilot group across placement groups this rate was 40%, compared to 20% for the non-pilot group. This difference was attributable to the ESL 10 placement group (27% for pilot group and 7% for non-pilot); and to the ESL 20 placement group (45% for pilot; 25% for non-pilot). The ESL 30 placement group difference between pilot and non-pilot course completion was 9%, which was not greater than expected by chance.

Completions with repeats showed an overall rate of 20%. This rate was marginally greater for the ESL 10 group (27%) and smaller for the ESL 30 group (14%). This rate was also somewhat greater for the pilot group (25%) than for the non-pilot group, attributable only to the ESL 10 and 20 placement groups, with the ESL 30 placement group rate unaffected.

It is clear that the ESL 30 performance of both the ESL 10 and 20 placement groups improved significantly with the implementation of the pilot approach. There is a possibility that, with the introduction of the approach, the criteria for passing were less stringent. ESL 10 and ESL 20 pilot courses used new criteria for advancement in the sequence. However, the criterion for the completion of ESL 30 did not change, i.e. passing the SKAT (University-required Skills Assessment Test) writing test. Therefore, it seems that the pilot curricula and related changes in criteria for advancement did not adversely affect ESL 30 performance, but actually improved it for students who began with a lower placement. It should be noted, however, that for the ESL 10 placement group, only completion without repeats was affected by pilot program participation, whereas the ESL 30 failure rate was unaffected for this group. Finally, the data seem to suggest that although the ESL 30 placement group may have an advantage of coming to ESL 30 with better skills, this group may be disadvantaged by not experiencing the work done in the two previous courses using the pilot approach.

HANDOUTS DEVELOPED FOR TEACHERS

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# FLUENCY FIRST

# IN

# ESL INSTRUCTION

prepared by

PROF. ELIZABETH RORSCHACH

and

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DEPT. OF ESL

CCNY

FALL 1992

FUNDED BY A GRANT FROM

THE FUND FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION



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## INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

In the fall of 1990, Profs. Elizabeth Rorschach and Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly, from the City College of the City University of New York, received a three-year grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) to work with CUNY ESL faculty in implementing a new reading and writing curriculum in ESL programs.

The new curriculum, based on current research in second language and literacy acquisition, reverses the traditional order of second language instruction. Instead of restricting the amount of reading and writing ESL students were asked to do, this curriculum requires students, even at low levels, to read 1,000 pages and to write 10,000 words over the course of a 15-week semester.

Our initial research has shown that this shift in curricular focus--from controlled activities aimed at helping the students produce correct language to expanded language-rich activities aimed at helping the students acquire the language--has improved students' writing and reading abilities, has reduced repetition rates, and has greatly increased students' interest in their work in the program.

The workshops we have developed give ESL reading and writing teachers the opportunity to learn about and discuss whole-language teaching methods. There are certain aspects of whole-language instruction that we want to discuss in the workshops, but we also want to keep them open enough to allow the participants opportunities to discuss what's happening in their classes.

Previous participants, from CCNY and other CUNY colleges, have found that the workshops provided them with a supportive community of colleagues who were all wrestling with the same problems--how to help our students succeed--and who had the time to gather and discuss various solutions. Developing this sense of community is a major goal of the workshops.

Profs. Rorschach, MacGowan-Gilhooly, and Susan Weil are the workshop leaders, but not necessarily the resident experts. That is, every teacher participating in these workshops has much to offer to the group, and we hope that each participant will come to recognize her own expertise. We have developed a curriculum that is proving to be successful at CCNY, and we want to share our experiences with you and then help you decide how best to use what we know in your own teaching situations. Consider these workshops models of whole language classrooms, and think about ways to incorporate what we do into your methods.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTICIPATING TEACHERS

Fall 1992

1. Attend all workshop sessions.

2. Keep teaching and reading logs. The teaching log is a record of classroom "events" as well as a journal of your own speculations about why certain things occur. Events to record:

   a. Assignments given and students' written/oral work fulfilling these.

   b. Daily class activities.

   c. Notes on students' work and progress.

   d. Questions and problems (for sharing with workshop group).

   e. Anything else that seems appropriate.

   We are asking for the logs for several reasons: 1) We cannot observe every class session, yet it's important for us to know what is happening. The logs will constitute a written record of daily activities, to give us a more complete picture of your teaching. 2) The logs will give you a chance to think about your teaching in a very active way--this writing requires careful thought. You can raise questions, speculate and hypothesize, describe and complain, and even discover some answers. You'll find them burdensome at times, but always enlightening. 3) The logs will provide a basis for periodic conferences between you and us (see below). We will collect these logs, read through them, and write back to you. 4) The logs will help you prepare for each of the workshops, as you record questions and issues to raise at the meetings. They may also provide material for any informal meetings you have with other participating teachers.

3. Attend periodic conferences with your workshop leader. (These may be by telephone.) At the first workshop we will decide how frequently to schedule the conferences.

4. Allow your workshop leader to observe your class on a prearranged schedule.

SCHEDULE OF WORKSHOPS

FALL 1992

Workshop 1:

1. Background on the FIPSE grant and requirements for participants
2. Fluency-Clarity-Correctness model; samples
3. Writing-to-learn activities, freewriting
4. Starting logs; sharing; questions

Workshop 2:

1. Sharing logs
2. Journals: double entry, dialog, etc.
3. Written projects: organizing, getting started

Workshop 3:

Responding to and evaluating students' texts

Workshop 4:

Reading, vocabulary development

Workshop 5:

Grammar



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# The Fluency-Clarity-Correctness Model
Prepared by Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly, 1990

Great advances in our understanding of L2 and literacy development have been made in research and theory in recent years. From what is known now about those two processes, we have developed an approach to L2 literacy development based on the following premises:

1. Premise: L2 best develops in ways similar to L1, and therefore needs similar types and quantities of language.

2. Premise: Literacy (in any language) best develops in ways similar to oral language development.

Both 1 and 2, above, imply that we use an L2 literacy approach that:

a. is holistic;
b. offers massive exposure;
c. occurs in supportive, low-anxiety environments where the the negotiation of meaning takes precedence;
d. stresses making oneself understood and understanding others rather than correctness;
e. allows the content of language to be learner-chosen and controlled... thus language is used for simpler content before more concept-dense content;
f. offers abundant opportunity for interactions with peers and with more knowledgeable others;
g. is interesting and enjoyable;
h. utilizes language to get real things done.

Thus we chose a sequence of learning to write suggested by Mayher, Lester and Pradl in Learning to Write/Writing to Learn, (New Hampshire: (Heinemann/Boynton-Cook, 1983): a whole-language approach stressing fluency first, then clarity, then correctness. We have applied this approach to reading as well.

## Writing

Fluency: the ability to describe, narrate, and otherwise express oneself in writing with relative ease.

Clarity: the ability to write expository pieces that are clear, well developed, complete, and logically organized.



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Correctness: the ability to write expressively and expositorily with a minimum (or no) minor grammatical or mechanical errors, and with no major errors (e.g. word order, tense usage, undiscipherable spelling, etc.)

Although the Mayher model was intended to describe how writing develops, we have extended it to fit our students' reading needs as well, within our ESL sequence.

## Reading

Fluency: the ability to comprehend popular fiction.

Clarity: the ability to comprehend expository prose.

Correctness: the ability to comprehend expsitory texts written for college-level students, and advanced journalistic material written for educated audiences (e.g. New York Times, Time magazine, etc.).

## GOALS AND ACTIVITIES FOR ESL 10, 20, AND 30

Thus our goals for ESL 10, 20 and 30 are now fluency, clarity and correctness, respectively, achieved through the following activities.

### ESL 10 Goal - Fluency

Writing: writing letters, journal entries, autobiographical pieces, interview pieces, and writing to learn. Revising these with the help of peers and teachers.

Reading: reading popular novels, like Rebecca, The Godfather, If Tomorrow Comes, Murder on the Orient Express, The Sun Also Rises and Love Story. Discussing these with peers and teachers to enhance understanding and enjoyment.

### ESL 20 Goal - Clarity

Writing: writing essays, research summaries, point-of-view pieces, and term papers that have a clear main idea, sufficient support, logically sequenced ideas and paragraphs, strong introductions and conclusions, and no unnecessary or repetitive material.



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Reading: comprehending expository texts and historical novels and other best sellers that are intended for general adult readership.

ESL 30 Goal - Correctness

Writing: writing persuasive essays and letters that are clear (as in 2 above) and free or almost free of mechanical and grammatical errors.

Reading: understanding material written for college-educated people.

## Samples of Fluent and Clear Writing

### Fluent writing

(Task: describe a character you liked from a book you read.)

The character that I liked the best this semester was Charlie in Flowers for Algernon. He was like me, a nice person who can't read or write too good. He was retarded, and so he went to a school to learn how read and write. But even he tried hard, he didn't learned much. But he liked his teacher, she was a beutifull young woman. And she liked Charlie.

One day she told him to be in a brain experiment, a operation, to make he more intelligent. So they operated his brain and he became the more intelligent than scientifics and college professors. He knew many languages too, but he very unhappy. He loved his teacher, but he made some research and he learn that his operation was not able to be a complete success. He knew he will become stupid and retarded again. So he planed to go to a nice school for retarded people where he will be happy. In the end, he went to that school and his teacher was very sad.

The end was very sad because Charlie suffered too much. He was frustrate and he tried hard to make the operation last. He used all his scientific knowledge, but it resulted a failure. But I liked him more because he always keep on trying. I have problems to learn to write and read in English too. Some people make fun my accent, like they do to Charlie. But he didn't get mad at them, he nice to them anyway. It is a good example for me. He always tried to be nice and to learn and that why I want to be like Charlie. Even he was retarded, he acted responsible and nice to everyone. And that is more important than anything.

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Clear writing

(Prompt: describe what you think is the worst problem in the U.S.A. and what can be done to solve it.)

The worse problem in America today is drugs. People take drugs and ruin their lives, their family lives, and part of society. They ruin their health, they embarrass and frighten their families, and they don't take their responsibility in society. They don't make money to support them or their families, and they break the law and cause problems for society rather than they contribute something to society like a responsible adult should do. They are burderns rather than helpers; they are like children, not adults. They also cause violence because they buy drugs from violent narcotrafficants and they sometimes steal money and hurt people in order to buy drugs.

Drug addiction causes illness and death. The average life span of a drugadict is only 38, compared with the national life span of 72. They die from overdoses, from AIDS from needles, from other violent drug people, from diabetes, heart failure, accidents and malnutrition. They ruin their family lives too. Their children born with drugadiction and some die. Their wifes and husbands have to support the whole family and do all the work. They ignore their children and then they become school dropouts and drugadicts too. And this continues into the next generations.

Society suffers too because adult drugadicts are like babies and they don't work and just depend of everyone for food, house, etc. They also make police, doctors, and prisons take care of they. They cause unnecessary work for everybody and they don't contribute nothing. In fact, crimes have increased by 1000 percent as drugs have increase in this country. Nine out of ten crimes are because of drugs. And millions of innocent victims of these crimes suffer too. So what is the answer?

I believe that there are several ways to solve these problems. First, narcotrafficants should be shot. Then, drugadicts should be in prison for life. That way they don't take drugs and don't hurt anybody. Also, we should make drug education programs and put them on T.V. every day. And finally, we should spend all the money we need to get rid of this problem, even we have to take money away from the other problems.



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METHODS TO USE IN WHOLE LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS
Prepared by Elizabeth Rorschach, 1991

"Whole language" means that all aspects of language are the focus of instruction and learning. "Student-centered" means that, when planning the course, the teacher takes into account the students' needs rather than just externally imposed criteria and goals. This means that the teacher must be ready to adjust her plans daily if necessary, as the students progress through the term. It becomes more challenging for the teacher to organize her class this way, but this sort of environment leads to more successful learning.

**Groups**

When students work in groups, they have opportunities to talk more, to share with each other, and to compare learning strategies with peers. All of these are important in helping them become more effective learners. For some, however, group work may be a new classroom experience, and the teacher must structure the groups so that the students have explicit and clear goals. Before beginning group work for the first time, it is useful to discuss with the students why they are working in groups and how this type of activity helps them achieve the overall goals for the course.

Time limits and clearly explained activities help structure the group assignment for the students. It's important, also, to be flexible, and to allow the students themselves to make adjustments whenever necessary. Each group should also select its own recorder and reporter (two different students) when necessary (e.g., for reporting to the class on the group's discussion).

While the students are in groups, the teacher can either circulate, listening to each group's discussion for a few moments; or she can sit at her desk and wait for students to raise their hands when they need her help. What the teacher must not do is non-class related work while the students are in groups--they must not get the impression from her that groups are just one more way to make her life easier. Her job is to make sure that the groups run smoothly and that the students are doing the assigned work.

Activities for students to do in groups: 1) Discuss a reading selection and prepare questions for a whole-class discussion. 2) Share reading log entries or freewritings. 3) Share drafts of assignments. 4) Edit final drafts of assignments. 5) Brainstorm.

Students usually work best when they stay in the same group over a long period of time--this gives them the opportunity to develop a trustful working relationship with peers who may become friends through the process. They should, however, be given the option of changing groups if a problem arises that cannot be solved otherwise.

**Sharing**

This term means reading one's writing to others. The process of sharing can include a discussion of the writing, but at the least the students are reading their texts out loud.



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## Freewriting

You may already be familiar with freewriting, but it's important to be able to explain to students why freewriting is an important and useful writing exercise. It forces the writer to pay attention to ideas and to what's in his mind, and takes attention away from concern with correctness. For many of our ESL students, it may even help them stop translating from L1 to English. Whether the freewriting is "controlled" (i.e., you have given them a topic or a starting phrase) or free is not important. What is important is that the students do this exercise frequently. Fluent L2 writers are usually able to write 100+ words in five minutes, so you can occasionally ask the students to count the number of words they've written to see how well they're doing. Staying on the topic is not the goal--continuing to write is.

## Questioning

In teacher-centered classrooms, the teacher usually asks the questions, already knowing the right answers. The questions in this situation are a form of test. Sometimes the students ask questions as well, but only when the teacher invites questions, and only if the students are able to think of questions on the spot.

In student-centered classrooms, the students are encouraged (sometimes even required) to ask questions, and they have plenty of time to prepare these questions. For instance, when they are given reading assignments for homework, part of the reading log assignment will be to list 2 or 3 questions for class discussion. The next day's discussion might begin with students sharing their questions in their groups and then choosing some to ask the whole class. Freewriting at the beginning of a lesson can also be an opportunity for students to think of some questions for the discussion; also, students can stop in the middle or at the end of a discussion to freewrite their questions.

When the students are given the opportunity to plan and ask important questions, they gain more control of the classroom and learn more in the process.



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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following books and articles are available for borrowing from your workshop leader if you would like to do some background reading. You are not required to do so, but these articles will help you better understand the theoretical basis for the new curriculum as well as for the faculty development aspect of the FIPSE project.


Lester & Onore, Learning Change. Boynton/Cook, 1990.
This book describes an in-service teacher education program in a public school system and how this program helped the participating teachers change their ideas about learning and teaching.

Mayher, Uncommon Sense, Heinemann, 1990.
This book argues for a major change in educational design, moving toward student-centered learning and toward teaching that allows the students more choice and control.

Krashen, Principles and Practice in SLA, Pergamon, 1982.
Krashen here sets out his hypotheses about second language acquisition (SLA), including the input and monitor hypotheses and the acquisition-learning distinction.

Mayher, Lester & Pradl, Learning to Write/Writing to Learn, Boynton/Cook, 1983.
This book first sets up the fluency/clarity/correctness model for literacy acquisition, upon which this curriculum is based.

Atwell, In the Middle, Boynton/Cook, 1987.
This book gives the classroom teacher numerous ideas on how to help students develop as writers and readers in a workshop-format classroom. It also gives ideas for organizing such a class, and weaves in the theory of whole language literacy development in an enjoyably readable way.

MacGowan-Gilhooly, Achieving Fluency in English. A Whole Language Book and Achieving Clarity in English. A Whole Language Book. Kendall/Hunt, 1991.
These two books, designed for use with ESL reading/writing classes, details the various activities developed to help students complete their reading and writing assignments for high beginning and intermediate level courses.

Rigg, "Whole Language in Adult ESL Programs," ERIC/CLL News Bulletin, March 1990.
This article presents a brief introductory discussion of the theoretical basis for whole language instruction and describes a model program from a school in Vancouver, B.C.

Diaz, "ESL College Writers: Process and Community," Journal of Developmental Education, November 1988.
This article reviews current L1 and L2 acquisition research and explains how these support pedagogical approaches which involve collaboration and other learner-centered activities.


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Hartwell, "Grammar, Grammars, and the Teaching of Grammar," College English, February 1985.

This article discusses in depth the current research on the efficacy of explicit grammar instruction (in response to Kolln, see below) and concludes that such instruction is not useful.

Kolln, "Closing the Books on Alchemy," College Composition and Communication, May 1981.

This article questions whether research has finally proven grammar instruction to be useless , and proposes more research.

Mellon, "Language Competence", The Nature and Measurement of Competency in English, NCTE, 1981.

This article expands the definition of competence in a language and argues against traditional competency testing.



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FIPSE ESL Project

Fall 1992

Permission Form

I, _____, give my permission for Prof. Elizabeth Rorschach and/or Prof. Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly and/or Prof. Susan Weil to quote in whole or in part from any interview or written materials they collect from me as a result of my participation in the FIPSE Fluency-First Project. I understand that these materials are being collected for the purposes of research and may be used in conference presentations and/or articles/books for publication. I also understand that Profs. Rorschach, MacGowan-Gilhooly, and/or Susan Weil will allow me to edit any quoted materials before publication.

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(signature)

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(date)

I would like my name given when my materials are quoted: YES NO



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CITY COLLEGE FIPSE PROJECT
FLUENCY FIRST
DEPT OF ESL

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE
FALL 1992

As we go through the semester, I'd like you to fill out this questionnaire in order to help me evaluate the workshop series you attended and to help me plan the workshops for next semester. Please answer as completely as you can, and feel free to call me to clarify any questions you're unsure of. I will be using your responses as part of my research data, but it isn't necessary for you to sign your name. Thanks for your help.

1. Which workshops did you attend (please check appropriate ones)?
   #1
   #2
   #3
   #4
   #5

2. What factors made you decide to participate in this workshop series? What did you hope to gain by participating?

**Workshop Dynamics**

3. Was the size of the group comfortable for you?

4. Did you have ample opportunity to share your own experiences?

5. Did the workshop leaders seem well-prepared for each session?

6. Was the room large enough?

**Workshop Content**

7. What ideas/techniques presented in the workshops were already familiar to you?

8. What ideas/techniques were new?


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9. How have the ideas/techniques presented been useful to you? What did you implement in your teaching? How was it useful to you?

10. Were the handouts useful? How?

**Class Results**

11. How did your teaching change as a result of what you learned from the workshops?

12. What changes did you notice in your students' behavior as a result of changes in your teaching?

13. What changes did you notice in their language abilities?

14. What changes did you notice in classroom ambiance/dynamics?

**Future Workshops**

15. What issues/problems would you like the next set of workshops to cover?

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**Draft**

**Fluency First in ESL - Annotated Bibliography**

**Compiled by Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly, Elizabeth Rorschach and Gail G. Verdi**

Atwell, Nancie. In the Middle. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1987.

This book gives the classroom teacher numerous ideas on how to help students develop as writers and readers in a workshop-format classroom. It also gives ideas for organizing such a class, and weaves in the theory of whole language literacy development in an enjoyable, readable way.

Belanoff, Pat & Dickson, eds., Portfolios. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton-Cook/Heinemann 1991.

This book is a collection of essays describing how various programs have designed and used portfolio evaluations.

Britton, James. Language and Learning. New York: Penguin Books, 1970.

Britton looks back at what he has learned about children's language development as a parent as well as a teacher. He considers the reciprocal nature of language growth and life experience. His theory is based on the assumption that we learn and construct our views of the world through talk and interaction.

Cazden, Courtney. Classroom Discourse: The Language of Teaching and Learning Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988.

Cazden studies what happens when teachers and students talk and the effect of different discourse styles on the kind of learning that takes place in the classroom.

Clay, Marie. What Did I Write? Beginning Writing Behavior. Portsmouth, NH Heinemann, 1975. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 264 571.)

See next draft. 11/29/93

Crandall, Joann, ed., ESL Through Content-Area Instruction. Englewood Cliffs, NJ Prentice-Hall, 1987. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 283-387).

This book is a collection of essays describing ways in which English language instruction is being integrated with science, math, and social sciences in elementary, secondary and college classes.

Diaz, "ESL College Writers: Process and Community," Journal of Developmental Education, November 1988.

This article reviews current L1 and L2 acquisition research and explains how these support pedagogical approaches which involve collaboration and other learner-centered activities.



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Donaldson, Margaret. Children's Minds. New York: Norton Press, 1978.

The author of this text questions Piaget's theories on language development by asking why lively preschool children often become semiliterate and defeated when they are expected to acquire skills like reading, writing and arithmetic in elementary school. She argues that teaching skills like reading in an unnatural setting, isolated from real-life contexts, makes it difficult for young children to make the transition into the abstract world of education.

Edelsky, Carole. Writing in a Bilingual Program: Habia una Vez. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1986.

The narrative of this book is based on the stories of children of migrant workers in the southwestern United States and their journey towards literacy. For the first time, these children were asked to write about issues that were related to their lives and to their learning. The research looks at their linguistic development over one year, describes a follow up study, and assesses the influence this study has had on bilingual education.

Freeman, Yvonne S. and David E. Freeman. Whole Language for Second Language Learners. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992.

The authors of this text argue that whole language is important for all learners, but it is even more important for second language learners. They provide examples of how teachers can apply whole language methods across different grade levels and with students from a range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. They also analyze more traditional methods of teaching a second language.

Goswami, Dixie and Peter R. Stillman, eds. Reclaiming the Classroom: Teacher Research as an Agency for Change. Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1987.

This book presents essays by a variety of writers involved in teacher research. Theorist-practitioners such as Shirley Brice Heath define what we mean when we say we are participating in classroom inquiry, while Lee Odell looks at the process we undertake when we begin to observe and analyze what goes on in the classrcom. In addition, there are several descriptions of how teacher research involves students in inquiry and how this involvement provides teachers with the opportunity to learn from their students.

Graves, Donald. Writing: Teachers and Children at Work. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1983.

See next draft, 11/29/93.

Harste, Jerome C., Virginia A. Woodward, & Carolyn L. Burke. Language Stories and Literacy Lessons. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1984.

This book explores the questions: How do our assumptions about the way students learn to read and write inform our practice? How can we look more closely at what happens when students are acquiring language? What is the role of theory in practitioner research and instruction in the language classroom?



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Hartwell,Patrick. "Grammar, Grammars, and the Teaching of Grammar." College English. February 1985.

This article discusses, in depth, the current research on the efficacy of explicit grammar instruction (in response to Kolln, see below) and concludes that such instruction is not useful.

Holdaway, Don. The Foundations of Literacy. Sydney: Ashton Scholastic, 1979.

Holdaway presents a clear picture of literacy education in New Zealand while providing a rich resource book for teachers. His text is full of activities that would inform the most experienced of whole language instructors. He looks at literacy instruction from a variety of perspectives, both traditional and non-traditional. He also includes a comprehensive section on linguistic analysis.

Holdaway, Don. Stability and Change in Literacy Learning. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1984.

In this text Holdaway's stance is more of a theorist than a practitioner. When compared to "Foundations," the reader feels a sense of distance from the author. However, this seems appropriate due to the subject matter. He is focusing on the development of literacy programs in the eighties, and the environments these programs foster.

Hudelson, Sarah. Write On: Children Writing in ESL. Language in Education: Theory and Practice 72. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, and ERIC. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents, 1989.

Hudelson considers the impact that research in L1 acquisition has had on L2 practice. She describes a whole language approach for the elementary ESL class that includes peer response to writing, and methods that might help teachers to consider the special elements that ESL students bring with them into the classroom.

Kolln,Martha. "Closing the Books on Alchemy." College Composition and Communication. May 1981.

This article questions whether research has finally proven grammar instruction to be useless, and proposes more research.

Krashen,Stephen. Principles and Practice in SLA. New York: Pergamon, 1982.

Krashen here sets out his hypotheses about second language acquisition (SLA) including the input and monitor hypotheses and the acquisition-learning distinction.

Lester, Nancy B. and Cynthia S. Onore. Learning Change. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton-Cook/Heinemann, 1990.

This book describes an in-service, whole language, teacher education program in a public school system and how this program helped the participating teachers change their ideas about teaching and learning.

Lindfors, Judith Wells. Children's Language and Learning. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2nd edition, 1991.

This book looks at children at work in the classroom, and their use of language as a learning tool. Throughout the text the author models ways in which teachers can observe their students' progress, understand it, and encourage it.

MacGowan-Gilhooly, Adele. Achieving Fluency in English: A Whole Language Book and Achieving Clarity in English: A Whole Language Book. Kendall, Hunt, 1991.

These two books, designed for use with ESL reading/writing classes, detail the various activities developed to help students complete their reading and writing assignments for high beginning and intermediate level courses in a Fluency First program.

MacGowan-Gilhooly, Adele. Fluency Before Correctness: A Whole Language Experiment. College ESL, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1991.

In this article the author provides a detailed description of the Fluency First curriculum.

MacGowan-Gilhooly, Adele. Fluency First: Reversing the Traditional ESL Sequence. Journal of Basic Writing, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1991.

This article describes the theoretical background supporting the Fluency First approach to reading and writing for ESL college students, as well as its implications for the Basic Writing classroom.

Mayher, John. Uncommon Sense. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1990.

This book argues for a major change in educational design, moving toward student-centered learning and toward teaching that allows the students more choice and control.

Mayher, John, Nancy Lester, and Gordon Pradl. Learning to Write/Writing to Learn. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton-Cook/Heinemann, 1983.

This book first sets up the fluency/clarity/correctness model for literacy acquisition, upon which the Fluency First curriculum is based.

Mellon, John. Language Competence: The Nature and Measurement of Competency in English. NCTE, 1981.

This article expands the definition of competence in a language and argues against traditional competency testing.

Rigg, Pat. Whole Language in Adult ESL Programs. ERIC/CLL News Bulletin, March 1990.

This article presents a brief introductory discussion of the theoretical basis for whole language instruction and describes a model program from a school in Vancouver, B.C.

Rigg, Pat. "Whole Language in TESOL," TESOL Quarterly, Autumn 1991.
This article is a survey of whole language ESL programs and research.

Rigg, Pat and D. Scott Enright, eds., Children and ESL: Integrating Perspectives Washington, DC: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). 1986.
This book was written by a group of teachers working together to dispel the myth that children who are learning English as a Second Language are 'limited' in some way. The essays in this text reveal the writing processes of children as well as their personal stories and triumphs.

Smith, Frank. Understanding Reading, 2nd edition. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1978.
The author presents a thorough examination of learning theories that have informed reading pedagogy such as cognitive science models and those based on human thought and behavior. Smith concludes that it is important for teachers to understand these theories so that they can observe their students more closely but that it is important for us to remember that children learn to read by reading and by being read to by parents and teachers.

Vygotsky, Lev. Thought and Language. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1962.
Vygotsky looks closely at the relationship between what we think, what we say and how this affects learning. He begins by assessing theories on language development by Piaget and Stern, and continues by proposing his theory of how we acquire new knowledge and understanding - the Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD.

Weaver, Constance. Reading Process and Practice: From Sociopsycholinguistics to Whole Language. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988.
The author of this book believes that reading instruction should be based on what is known about how we learn and how we learn to read and write naturally. Weaver provides, in comprehensible language, the theoretical underpinnings of the whole language approach in the reading classroom. There are practical suggestions available for the classroom teacher to pick and choose from throughtout the text.

Weaver, Constance. Understanding Whole Language: From Principles to Practice Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1990.
The author pursues a clear definition of whole language by placing it within a philosophical framework. Chapters are dedicated to related research, practical implementation within the class, and assessment.

Wells, Gordon. Learning through Interaction: The Study of Language Development. Cambridge, Mass: Cambridge University Press. 1981.
See next draft, 11/29/93

Wells, Gordon. The Meaning Makers: Children Learning Language and Using Language to Learn. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1986.

This book focuses on the language development of a group of children from the time they began to utter their first words to their last days at elementary school. Wells kept records of the children's language growth, both oral and written, at home and in the classroom, and considered how children can take an active role in their own learning.

Wilson-Nelson, Marie. At the Point of Need: Teaching Basic and ESL Writers. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton-Cook/Heinemann, 1991.

This book presents the results of several years' work training tutors to work with ESL and basic writers. It presents strong support for whole language approaches to writing instruction for these two groups.

DRAFT

# Writing Samples from Writing Project

by Liz Ames

## I. ESL 10: Not Passing

A. Waldemar Palmaka
Poland
Prof. A. Tillyer in 10AB
Spring 1991
Midterm
5 pages; 0 paragraphs

B. William Fishburn
Puerto Rico
Prof. A. Tillyer in 10AB
Spring 1993
Final Exam
6 pages; 3 paragraphs

C. Mauricio Alba
Ecuador
Prof. A. Tillyer in 10AB
Spring 1991
Final
Description of Book
5 pages (double-spaced); 3 paragraphs

## II. ESL 10: Passing

A. Bazet Manjura
Ethiopia
Prof. A. Tillyer in 10AB
Spring 1993
Autobiography narrative
"Who Am I?: The Duplicate of My Mother"
4 pages; 6 paragraphs

B. Yajaira Pena
Dominican
Prof. A. Tillyer in 10 AB
Spring 1993
Autobiography narrative
"The Revelation"
4 pages; 11 paragraphs

C. Chunhwa Hyun
Korean
Prof. Brannham in 10CD
Fall 1991
Final Exam
Untitled
3 pages; 7 paragraphs

## III. ESL 20: Passing

A. Jenny Li
Chinese
Prof. Ames
Summer 1993
Final Exam
"Relations between English and Research"
2 1/2 pages; 5 paragraphs



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B. Judith Montero
Dominican
Prof. Ames
Summer 1993
Final Exam
Untitled
2 1/2 pages; 7 paragraphs

C. Aicha Diop
Nationality? Senegalese
Prof. Knight in 20CD
Spring 1993
First Point of View
"A Letter from Martin to Malcolm"
2 1/2 pages; 5 paragraphs

**IV. ESL 30: Passing**

A. Masako Osado
Japanese
Prof. Kowalcyk
Fall 1991
Final Exam
"Women in the Workplace"
3 1/2 pages; 5 paragraphs

B. Icker Zaldivar
Nationality?
Prof. ~~Rorshah~~
Spring 1991; specific date n/a
Argumentative Essay
"In Favor of Sex Education"
1 1/2 pages; 9 paragraphs

C. Yris Peralta
Ecuador
Prof. D. Tillyer in ESL 30FG
Spring 1993
Final Exam
Question One
6 pages; 9 paragraphs

**Introduction**

These 12 essays have been carefully selected from approximately 100 samples of student writing, ranging from Fall semester 1991 to Summer 1993. There are four categories listed: I. ESL 10: Not Passing; II. ESL 10: Passing; III. ESL 20: Passing; and IV. ESL 30: Passing.

In each category, there are three samples of student writing from an Asian student, a Hispanic, and a miscellaneous group. Some samples are first drafts and some are second. It was not always possible to tell how many drafts the student had completed. The writing assignments range from narratives to argumentative essay to final exams to carefully polished autobiographies. I have tried to select pieces that were written at the end of the semester.

The cover sheet, the first page, should be consulted to learn the background on the students and their professor. Other pertinent information may also be included. The two-paragraph commentary on each writing samples is identified only by title and


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the student's nationality.

Each essay is followed with a brief commentary about the strengths and weaknesses of the student's writing. An attempt has been made to assess the pieces with reference to the criteria for passing (and not passing) each student to a new level.

A note about ESL 30: Since the ESL final exam and in-class writings are based on 4-7 page texts that students read outside class, it was difficult for me to judge whether the student writers borrowed language from the assigned text without acknowledging the source. However, attempts have been made to find writing samples from ESL 30 that are free from plagiarism.

## I. ESL 10: Not Passing

### A. Poland — Untitled

What prevented these student from passing was the great gaps of information in his essay. From the onset, it was unclear what the purpose for writing the piece was. For instance, the piece began, "I live in Monroe." Yet, the location was never mentioned, the speaker was never identified, and no purpose for the piece could be discerned by the reader. Furthermore, no discenible organization is present, and no paragraphs were used. The student's lack of control over fluency was also evident with the limited variety of sentences. For instance, the writer repeated four times "I have..." Due to the lack of information and organization, the reader had to provide a great deal of inferences to identify the characters, location, time period, and narrator. The gaps of information were never filled.

### B. Puerto Rico — Untitled

From the onset, the student uses short, incomplete and fragmentary sentences that prevent the reader from understanding the meaning behind the writer's ideas. He opens with, "I need think in English for translation about it write." The reader can only glean a vague meaning from this sentence and many others. The fact that he used weak vocabulary and incorrect word forms throughout the piece also prevented smooth reading. The lack of coherence in and control over the writing was also evident in the absence of paragraphs: there were virtually none. Clearly, the choppiness of the student's thoughts as evidenced in his writing prevented him from advancing to ESL 20.

### C. Ecuador — Untitled

There was no reason to promote this student because of the lack of boundaries throughout the piece. The student lacks paragraphs, punctuation, and often uses run-on sentences, all of which interfere with the author's message. The student's inability to focus the piece was immediately evident in the introduction: "My opinion of this book is that black people in the ARMY in the year 1944.. sic. when was too much discrimination with black people, but also think that this book show me the adventages (sic) that made the black people." The main points are never clarified because the logic was quite weak and the word order distorted. Frequently, the reader had to pause to understand the writer's gist. Finally, the student cannot generate much writing; the piece


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was quite short. Based on lack of fluency, lack of boundaries, logical connections and syntax, there was no reason to promote this student to ESL 20.

**II. ESL 10: Passing**

**A. Ethiopian**

**Who Am I: The Duplicate of My Mother**

This talented writer tells a compelling story. She opens with the tale of her own birth which intrigues the reader to read on. Using short and simple sentences, she creates vivid images. Her tale dramatically unfolds as she writes of her mother's impending labor and her own birth, my mother "boils the water. She prepares her mat of rush. Beside her as she lies down are some scissors, some strips of clean cloth and a bowlful of water... My mother does not cry feels (sic) her flesh part. She has had five children before." Of all the student papers, she had the strongest rhythm of language and the strongest sense of the written word. In fact, her langugae was the most poetic of any of the student papers. For instance, she writes, "I look at her and see myself as a bird flying above the injustices of life on wings of pride." In short, she infused her story with creative language that resulted in vivid images and a compelling storyline.

Perhaps because her story flows easily, the writer tends to gush for an entire page without separating paragraphs. However, her story is so intriguing, that although her first paragraph contains 29 sentences, this flaw does not compromise her credibility as a writer who should be promoted to ESL 20.

**B. Dominican** **The Revelation**

In this essay, the writer steers a clear course through her childhood, her parents' divorce and her father's illness. In five pages, the writer tells a well-rounded story; the story moves along at a nice clip without ever digressing. The sense of completion can be attributed to the balanced paragraphs which the writer uses to sustain ideas. While the student does repeat from time to time, the repetition emphasizes that the writer is close to her father and values the intimacy between them.

The weakness of the piece is that it is not chronologically situated. References are made to vague times such as: "in the beginning," "at that time," "that day'" without ever mentioning a day, season or year. This vaguness, too, becomes apparent when the writer uses statments such as: "In the beginning, everything was going fine" or ""My stepfather is not the same as my father." Finally, the writer's use of repeated simple sentences at times creates monotony. Thus, "The Revelation" at times fails to reveal the writer's message.

**C. Korean** **Untitled**

The writer opens with a clear focus which shapes the piece from the start. There is a strong sense of purpose to this writing exercise. Throughout the piece there is also clarity and direction. For instance, in the second paragraph, he writes, "The most important reason I envy him is that he can speak two language

(sic)," which indicates to the reader that the writer has grasped the main points of the material and can relate them to the reader. Notably, the student demonstrates cohesion in the paragraphs and makes transition from one point to the other. The cohesion continues when the student writes about the author and compares his own situation to the writer's. Frequently, the student edits which signals the the reader that the writer can make sound decisions about appropriate language and sequence of ideas. These are talents that not many ESL 10 students have.

The only criticism of the piece is that the language is rather simplistic although the word forms (noun, adjective, verb, adverb) tend to be correct. This, however, is a minor criticism, and the only one that I have.

**III. ESL 20: Passing**

**A. Chinese Relations between English and Research**

This student's greatest asset is that she maintains a clear focus throughout the essay. She creates the impression of being in control of her topic and knowing its direction. She begins with a generalization and then moves to her own experiences of conducting research as a means to learn English. The reader has a confident voice because she organizes her writing around strong topic sentences such as: "The most important technique that I learnt was how to write a formal speech." Moreover, all of her ideas are pertinent to her topic; she at no time digresses. She also demonstrates control over her writing because she edited frequently in eleven spots (using Whiteout which produced clean copy).

However, the essay tends to lose color because of her overuse of "to be" verbs. Vividness is also lacking because she uses fairly simplistic vocabulary. Finally, although she clearly has provided a conclusion, it is integrated into her final paragraph when it should have been indented and separated from the previous paragraph.

**B. Dominican Untitled**

This student's essay was chosen because she gives the impression of presenting a balanced essay. She achieves this effect by writing an introduction with strong vocabulary, outlining the three points she will address in her essay at the onset, and using paragraphs that are consistent in size. She strengthens her essay by providing examples about the process she learned to research. These are good examples to support her thesis. Her writing also demonstrates variety. For instance, she uses a quote which not only gives her essay liveliness but which also supports her thesis. She also uses a variety of sentence structures (simple, complex, compound) which makes her writing more energetic. What she loses through inaccurate vocabulary and minor grammatical problems, she compensates for with emphatic adverbs (clearly, obviously) which add force to her ideas.

She has a tendency, however, to use casual language and inappopriate vocabulary. The lack of formality of her language is evident when she switches voices (from first to second) and overuses "good" (four times). At times, she will also resort to generalities such as: "Particulary, I learned a lot in this ESL research." These distractions tend to undermind the effectiveness



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of her message and the authority of her voice.

**IV. ESL 30: Passing**

**A. Asian**

**Untitled**

Throughout the essay the student gives the impression that she controls the language and the langauge does not control her. She achieves this through frequent use of conjunctive adverb, which creates an academic and authoritative tone in her writing. The appropriate formality of her voice is reinforced by embedded clasues such as: "the reason why... "or "the women who..." She also maintains authority through making a brisk assessment of the issue in her introduction and by then providing appropriate examples of women in the workplace rather than trite generalities. She also maintains this authoritative voice by quantifing the problem of sexism in the workplace through using statistics and phrases such as: one-thirds of women (sic), upper ranks, fewer opportunities, senior staff, last 10 years, and at the bottom.

The central weakness in the essay is that the writer fails to make sufficient transition when she jumps from discussing women scientists to women in the White House. She also makes two spelling mistakes and drops verbs. However, these minor infractions do not detract from the strength of her writing because she has organized her argument well and used suitable academic writing devices to add force to her ideas and argument.

**B. Nationality?**

**In Favor of Sex Education**

The strength of this student's essay lies in the liveliness of his writing and the freshness of his examples. Admirably, he has taken an oft-discussed issue and avoided sounding trite. His own experiences add clarity to his argument. He achieves a lively tone through providing a compelling introduction, avoiding repetition of ideas, and using strong vocabulary. For instance, he writes, "A student doesn't become a dictator or fascist after reading Mussolini's or Hitler's biographies." He also provides a logical chronological framework for his discussion (in the last decades, today) which makes the issue current and relevant.

The weakness of his writing is his inability to sustain the argument and explore it in depth. This may be attributed to excessive use of short paragraphs (nine). That is, the paragraphs often contain only two or three sentences. Moreover, he overuses questions (four), giving the impression that he has a limited knowledge of writing techniques.

**C. Ecuador** **Untitled**

This student earned a promotion from ESL 30 based on the fact that she could manipulate the reading and integrate it into her writing. She referred to the reading four times. and managed to quote the readings freuquently. This demonstrated an ability to select appropriate points for her readers. She also demonstrated sound organization skills, albeit not such strong writing.

Her writing skills are compromised because of her inability to succinctly state the issue at the beginning of the piece. She also has difficulty maintaining an academic writing tone. For instance, she overuses "thing" and switches voice from first person to second and then to third. Consequently, her main points were often too general and unfocussed. For instance, she writes, "There are much more interesting things to do insted of watching TV most of the time." Such general statements compelled the reader to reread the introduction for her purpose in writing the piece.

COURSE SYLLABI AND EXIT CRITERIA



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ESL 10 Curriculum

1. Aim

To help students achieve fluency in English, especially in reading and writing. Fluency in reading means being able to read popular fiction with sufficient speed and automaticity to have almost full comprehension. Fluency in writing means being able to generate writing that is comprehensible, has no major gaps or syntactical problems that could meaning ( e.g. wrong word order, missing subject pronouns), Tells the whole story, has a logical progression of ideas and a discernible ending. At this level, fluency is to be developed mainly in expressive, narrative and descriptive modes.

2. Objectives

At the end of a 14-week semester, students will be able to:

1. Read with sufficient speed and automaticity to comprehend popular fiction that has not been edited for ESL students.
2. Write pieces that are comprehensible, complete, logical, and free of major syntactic problems to the extent that these interfere with ease and confidence;
3. Freewrite with ease and confidence;
4. Discuss the novels assigned intelligibly and productively;
5. Help other ESL 10 students to revise their pieces for fluency;

3. Teaching Materials

1. Four to seven novels (1,000 pages ) and accompanying movies and/or videos.
2. Writing materials including a portfolio; computer disks if needed.

4. Methods

A combination of the following methods will be used:

1. A whole-laguage approach, where students read whole books and write a book ( a lengthy project) of their own, as well as keep a reading journal.
2. Freewriting to generate ideas and as a heuristic device.
3. Group work on readings and on revising writing project pieces.
4. A process approach to writing: Writing, getting feedback, revising, editing.
5. No formal grammar teaching or exercises, but explanations of grammar on an individual basis (a) upon student request and (b) where that problem interferes with comprehensibility.
6. The use of movies and other video material to help students to understand the novels.

5. Activities

1. Reading 10 pages a day of the required 1,000 pages.
2. Keeping a reading journal on those readings.
3. Freewritng every day for 10-15 minutes, either to generate ideas, explore ideas, or express one's feelings. Freewritng pieces may become writing project pieces.
4. Producing a 10,000 word writing project, revised for fluency: an autobiography, a fictional biography, biography, a novel, a magazine, or a "Collected Works" volume.
5. Finishing about 750 words of revised pieces per week toward the total of 10,000 words.
6. Participating in group reading sessions and regularly serving as the group recorder or group leader.
7. Helping peers to revise their written pieces by participating

productively in group revising sessions.

8. Experimenting with point-of-view writing, dialog writing, creative writing, and other forms of writing to strengthen writing skills.

6. Mid-term and Final Evaluations

1. Students will compete a self-evaluation at mid term ( see copy attached ) and indicate their progress toward fluency, the required work they've completed, their level of participation in class, and their attendance. Teachers will write responses to these evaluations indicating their agreement or disagreement.
2. During the semester, the students will keep all work in a folder, both first drafts and revised drafts. At the end of the semester, they will select 3 or 4 pieces that they wish to be evaluated on. Teachers will also give students on topics relevant to the students' reading during the course. These will be first drafts; i.e. students will not be allowed to work on them in groups or another day. However, the students will have as much time as they need in class to write and revise. Then, the ESL10 faculty will meet and each student's portfolio will be evaluated for fluency by two other teachers. The portfolio will contain the chosen pieces and the in-class first drafts. These will be judged for fluency (see attached fluency criteria).

7. Exit from ESL 10

The following criteria will determine exiting to ESL 20:

1. Fluency in writing .
2. Completion of most of the required course work in ESL 10.

Overview for evaluating ESL 10 essays

A passing essay is understandable from beginning to end. Although the language does not seem like a native English speaker's, the writer shows enough control of English structure and vocabulary to express his or her ideas. The vocabulary may be at times too simple or inappropriate for the topic, but in general, these weaknesses do not prevent the reader from understanding what the writer is saying. The writing shows ease of expressing, and despite errors in grammar and spelling, communication is never lost. The length of the piece is appropriate to the topic.

Specific factors in a passing essay

1. Central focus: Although the writer may go off the topic occasionally, the essay focuses on the assigned topic or question throughout most of the assay.

2. Comprehensibility: The reader does not have to struggle to understand the writer's meaning by rereading or guessing. If certain word or phrases are unclear, context clues help the reader to understand the meaning.

3. Quality of ideas: The ideas make sense. The write usually tries to explain, illustrate, and support ideas with examples and details. Because they are appropriate, logical and relevant, these details and example help the write to communicate his or her ideas without leaving the main topic. There may be some repetition, but the piece shows logical connections between ideas. The writer's main points and details are not superficial. Liveliness and originality raise the general level of the essay.

4. Sentence length and form: The variety in sentence types may be limited; the writer may use some complex sentence patterns, though not always correctly.

5. Vocabulary: The choice of vocabulary is adequate for the topic, although it might be repetitious or simple. The writer does not use unnecessary words and vague, meaningless terms. The essay may have errors in spelling, linking expressions, vocabulary or word forms, but these problems do not cause a breakdown in meaning.

6. Sentence and paragraph: Punctuation is correct enough so that errors do not confuse the reader. The essay may contain sentence fragments and run-on sentences, but they do not make the writer's meaning unclear. The writer also uses indentation and change of main idea to define paragraphs, although this may be unsuccessful at times.

7. Grammar: The writer's sentences show understanding of basic English word order. The grammar of the writer's native language may sometimes cause mistakes like inverted word order or plural adjuctives, but these mistakes do not prevent the reader from understanding the writer's meaning. Verb forms and tenses are at least 60% correct.

8. Completeness: The essay has a logical structure with a clear beginning, middle, and end. The parts are logically related to each other, with no gaps, so that the whole essay appears finished to both the writer and the reader. Most ideas are explained, although there may be a few undeveloped points or digressions.

Department of ESL
City College, CUNY
ESL 20 Curriculum

I. Aim

To help students achieve clarity in English, especially in writing. Clarity in writing includes fluency (see criteria for ESL 10), as well as the following: a clear focus (main idea), strong beginning and ending, clear organization (includes logical paragraphing), clear and logical transitions, appropriate details and examples to clarify ideas for the reader.

II. Objectives

At the end of a 14-week semester, students will be able to:

-- write essays that are comprehensible, complete, logical, and free of major syntactic problems that interfere with comprehensibility;
-- write essays that are well-organized, with a clear focus and strong beginnings and endings;
-- discuss assigned readings intelligibly and productively;
-- help other ESL 20 students revise and edit their pieces for clarity.

III. Teaching Materials

1. Achieving Clarity in English: A Whole Language Book
2. One college-level text on American history, society, or culture
3. One or two other books related to topic of college-level text

IV. Methods

A combination of the following methods will be used:

1. A whole-language approach where students read books and write a book of their own, as well as keep a reading journal;
2. Freewriting to generate ideas and as a heuristic exercise;
3. Group work on readings and on revising project pieces;
4. Explanations of grammar on an individual basis (a) upon student request or (b) where the problem interferes with comprehensibility, keeping formal grammar instruction to a minimum.

V. Activities

1. Reading 5-10 pages daily of the required readings.
2. Keeping a reading log.
3. Freewriting every day for 5-10 minutes, either to generate ideas, explore ideas, or express one's feelings. Freewriting pieces may be worked on to become part of writing project.
4. Producing a 10,000-word writing project: on a topic (student-selected) dealing with some aspect of American history, society, or culture.

5. Finishing about 750 words of the 10,000-word project weekly (revised; project assignments detailed below).
6. Participating in group reading sessions and regularly serving as the group recorder or group leader.
7. Helping peers to revise and edit their written pieces by participating productively in group revising sessions.
8. Using movies and other video material to supplement the readings.

VI. Project Assignments

The 10,000-word project will consist of the following assignments (not necessarily in this order; 1 page = 200 words):

1. Position paper (2-3 pages), stating topic, why it was chosen, and the questions the writer has about it.
2. Observation report (4-5 pages), describing a place the writer visited in NYC and discussing its connection with project topic.
3. Two point-of-view pieces (2 pages each), in which writer takes on the persona of someone connected to topic and writes from that person's viewpoint.
4. Interview transcript (3-4 pages) and analysis (2-3 pages), reporting on an interview conducted with an expert on the topic
5. Two book reviews (5 pages each), briefly summarizing each book's content, and then analyzing and evaluating what writer learned while reading it.
6. Two progress reports to the teacher (2 pages each), reporting progress and problems encountered.
7. Two formal letters (1 page each); one a thank-you letter to interview subject, the other a request for information on topic.
8. Library report (2 pages), describing the process undergone to locate supplementary materials in the library.
9. Research report or Action paper (10-12 pages). If research report, a synthesis of all the information collected, from all sources. If action paper, a publication for a broader audience, to inform and encourage readers to take some kind of action.
10. Final report (5 pages), briefly summing up what was learned about topic and then analyzing process of doing the project and how it affected writer's ability to read/write English. Can include a course evaluation.

VII. Midterm and Final Evaluations

1. Students will complete a self-evaluation at midterm (similar to ESL 10 midterm evaluation) indicating their progress toward clarity, their progress on completing course requirements, their participation in class, and their attendance. Teachers write responses to these evaluations indicating agreement or disagreement.



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2. During the semester, students will keep all work in a folder, both first drafts and revised drafts. At the end of the semester, they will select 3 or 4 pieces that they wish to be evaluated on. Teachers will also give 2 or 3 in-class assigned pieces on topics relevant to the students' reading during the course. These will be first drafts; i.e., students will not be allowed to work on them another day. However, the students will have as much time as they need in class to write and revise their pieces. Then, the ESL 20 faculty will meet and each student's portfolio (with the chosen pieces and the in-class pieces) will be evaluated for clarity by two other teachers.

VIII. Exit from ESL 20

The following criteria determine exiting from ESL 20 to ESL 30:

1. Clarity in writing (see specific criteria listed below)
2. Most of the course work has been completed

*Criteria for Clarity* (adapted from Achieving Clarity in English, MacGowan-Gilhooly, 1992)

1. The piece is comprehensible and fluent.
2. The piece has a clear focus throughout, with no digressions or gaps.
3. The piece is complete, with a hierarchy of ideas, and with adequate connections between ideas.
4. The piece has a clear main idea, with sufficient support for it (anecdotes, examples, facts, analogies).
5. The piece has no unnecessary or repetitive material.
6. The piece has logically related sentences and paragraphs.
7. The piece has an introduction and a conclusion that does not just repeat the introduction.
8. The piece has no consistent problems of a severe nature; e.g., poor or no control of verb forms and tenses, punctuation, syntax.

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# ESL 30 CURRICULUM

I. Aim

To introduce students to academic writing and prepare them for effectively handling writing assignments in academic courses

II. Objectives

At the end of 13 weeks of intensive instruction, students will be able to:

- critically express in writing their ideas drawn from readings and relate these ideas to their world experience
- write well-organized essays in response to a variety of assigned prompts
- write summaries and paraphrases of reading materials without resorting to plagiarism
- use advanced level sentence structure and vocabulary in their writing
- learn and apply editing strategies

III. Teaching Materials:

(1) Content Textbook

In selecting the content area textbook, we should choose from anthologies which have:

(a) readings on different topics related to one specific topic (ex: immigrant experience)
(b) readings on a general content area, such as world civilization, anthropology, psychology, technology, etc.
(c) independent thematic units on different topics (ex: feminism, space travel, nuclear arms race, etc.



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(c) Supplementing the course with one hour writing lab activity, in collaboration with tutors (offering it as a 7-hr course)

(d) Teaching it as an independent course, with occasional help from the Writing Center Staff (as it is currently being done)

V. Techniques

The following general criteria should apply to whatever techniques individual instructors may want to use.

(a) Every effort should be taken to balance fluency with accuracy in writing.

(b) Pattern centered discussions requiring students to analyze the different rhetorical or organizational patterns followed by native English writers should be part of the instruction, especially because these conventions are culture-bound. However, in giving any kind of writing assignments, students should not be asked to find topics to fit into the pattern. Instead, a functional approach should be followed, with audience and purpose clearly spelled out so that the asignments are meaningful in relation to students' real life experience.

Example: Suppose you feel strongly that the author's statement "....." is prejudicial to minority parents. Write a letter to her/him expressing your disagreement.

(c) Reading assignments should be preceded by some kind of pre-reading activity. (For example, students may be asked to freewrite, using their background knowledge on the topic of the reading selection.

(d) Students should not be required to write (except for pre-reading activities) before they are exposed to the topic by way of reading or discussion.

(e) Whatever discrete point discourse elements taught (paragraph structure, syntax, etc), should be context-based and meaning-oriented--not based on rules per se.

(f) Writer-based prose writing (journals, autobiography, free writing, etc.) should be supplemented with a good deal of reader-based (formal, written specifically for an audience) prose writing on assigned topics, generated from reading assignments and discussions.

4. Each aspect of the theme should be explained with examples, data/statistics, anecdotes, etc., drawn from the reading selection and from the students' own experience of the world.
5. The essay should display the student's ability to manipulate advanced level sentence structure and vocabulary.
6. An essay which shows recurrent errors in basic grammar, such as those related to s/v agreement, use of verb tenses, verb forms and word forms should be evaluated negatively.

The mid-term essay (if given) should be evaluated by at least one external reader. The system of group reading of the final exam, as it currently exists, should be continued. The present scoring system should also be continued.

A student who receives an F on the final exam should not pass the course, except in extreme and exceptional cases, judged by the coordinator, in consultation with the instructor.

C. Portfolios

Portfolios should contain all the items mentioned in VI above. The evaluation of portfolios is left to individual instructors. They can also be used to appeal results of final exam.

IX. Exit from ESL 30

The following criteria determine exiting from ESL 30 to English 110:

1. A passing score (P) on the final exam *from two readers*
2. Satisfactory completion of minimum writing assignments (See VI, 1-7 and VIII above)
3. Attendance and participation in class

*A. Koshi*
*Spring, 1992*

## ESL 30: READING AND EVALUATION OF STUDENT ESSAYS:
Criteria

1. The essay should specifically address the topic chosen. This means, it should be rightly focused on the topic you have assigned/the student has chosen.

2. There should be a clearly expressed thesis.

3. The thesis should be followed through the entire essay, with no digressions.

4. Too much repetition of the same idea, even if it is given in different vocabulary, etc. should be negatively evaluated.

5. Each paragraph should talk about only one subtopic. (one central topic for each paragraph)

6. Each subtopic should be explained with examples drawn from the reading assigned and/or the student's own world experience of the topic. (Research on the topic is not required, but encouraged, depending on the speicific situation of the writing assignment given.)

7. Some closure is expected, but omitting this part is not very crucial.

8. Sentence structure should display some kind of sophistication. (Ex. Balanced use of simple, complex, and compound sentences)

9. At least 75% accuracy in grammar, sentence structure, and word order is expected.

Please note:

Consistent errors in the following areas are inexcusable at the ESL 30 level.

(a) S/V agreement

(b) Word forms (Ex. Using verbs as gerunds and participles, nouns as adverbs, etc.)

(c) Verb tenses (Ex. Using the present tense for the past tense)

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SAMPLE TESLFF-L (e-mail list) DISCUSSIONS



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Return-Path: <@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU:owner-teslff-l@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>
Received: from CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU (NJE origin LISTSERV@CUNYVM) by CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU
(LMail V1.1d/1.7f) with BSMTP id 6143; Thu, 4 Nov 1993 21:21:54 -0500
Date: Thu, 4 Nov 1993 21:22:04 -0500
Reply-To: J1GREEN@RCNVMS.RCN.MASS.EDU
Sender: "TESLFF-L Fluency First and Whole Language (TESL-L sublist)"
<TESLFF-L@CUNYVM.BITNET>
From: John Green <J1GREEN@RCNVMS.RCN.MASS.EDU>
Subject: Separate courses
To: Multiple recipients of list TESLFF-L <TESLFF-L@CUNYVM.BITNET>

In a message posted to TESLFF-L on October 1 Dr. Elizabeth Rorschach gave some information about the way time is distributed in the Fluency First program at City College CUNY.

"Fluency level - 9 hours/week class time + 1 hour/week tutoring + 3 hours/week oral communications course. Most students at this level are also taking courses in math, phys ed, freshman orientation, and other courses light in reading and writing.
Clarity level - 6 hours/week (writing course) + 1 hour/week tutoring + 4 hours/week (reading course). Students also taking math, art, etc.
Correctness level - 6 hours/week (writing course) + optional 4 hours/week (reading course). Students may also be in writing/reading intensive bridge courses meeting core curriculum requirements. No tutoring at this level because we don't have enough funding for it. Ideally, we'd require it at this level as well.
Our terms are 14 weeks long, and one 'hour' is actually only 50 minutes.
Also, the Fluency level combines reading and writing in one course, which are then separated at the later levels."

One thing I find very interesting about this description is that oral communication is a separate course at the Fluency level, as is the reading course at the Clarity and Correctness level. I am curious: what are the pros (and cons?) of separating the program into more than one course at each level? Please note, I am *not* just addressing this question to Dr. Rorschach and the people at City College CUNY -- I'm curious what people in various programs think about this issue.

John T. Green, Adult Basic & State College, jgreen@rcn.mass.edu



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Received: from CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU (NJE origin LISTSERV@CUNYVM) by CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU
(LMail V1.1d/1.7f) with BSMTP id 9372; Fri, 5 Nov 1993 12:37:52 -0500
Date: Fri, 5 Nov 1993 12:35:36 -0500
Reply-To: J1GREEN@RCNVMS.RCN.MASS.EDU
Sender: "TESLFF-L: Fluency First and Whole Language (TESL-L sublist)"
<TESLFF-L@CUNYVM.BITNET>
From: John Green <J1GREEN@RCNVMS.RCN.MASS.EDU>
Subject: Re: SEPARATE COURSES
To: Multiple recipients of list TESLFF-L <TESLFF-L@CUNYVM.BITNET>

(NOTE: I am reposting the following message to TESLFF-L with the permission of the original sender. --John Green)

---

5-NOV-1993 11:59:14.53
From: IN%"hrutledg@lynx.dac.neu.edu"
To: IN%"J1GREEN@RCNVMS.RCN.MASS.EDU"
Subj: RE: Separate courses

I think it is important to separate courses, preferable into 3 or 4 at each level, in order to allow the students to get various input and some difference in teacher/subject matter through the day. Often this also means that there will be more repetition as the same points are covered by different teachers relative to different courses. If language learning were a purely rational process, then a very integrated course would be important, but in fact motivational factors and the need for repetition and practice are most important. Any program that can afford more than one teacher should be using separate course in each level imho.
Hugh Rutledge
hrutledg@lynx.dac.neu.edu


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Return-Path: <@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU:owner-teslff-l@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>
Received: from CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU (NJE origin LISTSERV@CUNYVM) by CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU
(LMail V1.1d/1.7f) with BSMTP id 6120; Wed, 10 Nov 1993 11:24:29 -0500
Date: Wed, 10 Nov 1993 10:49:07 EST
Reply-To: ESLSNOKE@UTVM1.BITNET
Sender: "TESLFF-L: Fluency First and Whole Language (TESL-L sublist)"
<TESLFF-L@CUNYVM.BITNET>
From: Judith Snoke <ESLSNOKE@UTVM1.BITNET>
Subject: Reading "activities"
To: Multiple recipients of list TESLFF-L <TESLFF-L@CUNYVM.BITNET>

Pardon the cross posting. This seemed like a topic for both lists.

I have been observing a student teacher who is more up on "the latest" than I am, teaching in my reading class. We usually see a movie and then read the related book - this time Richard Feynman's <What do you Care What Other People Think? I usually have the students review problem spots, then discuss the reading and related issues. We have occasional related writing assignments overnight. I expect the students to read 15 or more pages a day. I don't like to give in class writing assignments mostly because I hate them myself -- I like to be alone when I write and able to stop and go. And fundamentally I guess I have faith in the zen of reading - if you do it, you will do it.

My student teacher, on the other hand, has a big bag of tricks: outlining; note taking; assigning different passages to different students; group work; developing analogies; and other "activities". I am curious about how people on the list structure their reading classes.

The student shamed me into a more "creative" writing exercise. You may be familiar with giving out apple slices and asking the students to touch, smell, taste them, recall a time they ate an apple, then write about it. One of the class said, "I can't do this. I just brushed my teeth! Besides, I used to eat apples everyday. This is silly!" I had the students tell the class about what they wrote - all but one (guess which) had something memorable to say. Problem is, I agree with her!

signed: Old-fashioned in Blacksburg

Judith H. Snoke, Director <eslsnoke@utvm1.bitnet>
Virginia Tech Language Institute <eslsnoke@utvm1.cc.vt.edu>
Blacksburg, VA 24061-0101 (703) 231-6963


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[illegible] 8 Nov 1993 [illegible]
[illegible] from [illegible] by maroon.tc.umn.edu id
BMTP-80izcde6ac0023117; Mon, 8 Nov 93 10:07:29 -0600
Date: Mon, 08 Nov 1993 10:07:37 -0600
From: Robin Murie <rmurie2@MAROON.TC.UMN.EDU>
Subject: Re: Re:request for a Midterm check-in
To: EGRCC@CUNYVM.BITNET
Message-id: <01H52HXBTFAQBCAWDW@vx.cis.umn.edu>
X-Envelope-to: EGRCC@CUNYVM.BITNET
Content-transfer-encoding: 7BIT

In message "Dr. Elizabeth Rorschach" writes:
> I'm forwarding your request to Anthea, and she'll let me know what to do
> about it. If you're not cleared up by the end of next week, let me know.
> And I'm glad we've inspired your program to make changes. If you could
> send me a brief (2 paragraphs) description of what you're doing by 11/8,
> I'll be able to include it in our final report to FIPSE. (If you don't
> have time to do it, I'll understand, but if you do, just be sure to
> include name of school, program, etc.)
> Betsy Rorschach, City College, NYC (egrcc@cunyvm)

Betsy --

our program, based directly on the inspiration you all provided at CCCC's, decided to move from using a "reading" textbook (Bridging the Gap I believe was the book they used last year) to using a more "FF" approach in the first quarter reading course. This is within the context of a full year program for 60 students (mostly refugees/immigrants; 85% Vietnamese; scoring between 65 and 78 on the MELAB required for admissions. These are students who did not make the cut into the College of Liberal Arts or the Institute of Technology, and were therefore referred to the General College, a more open-admissions branch of the University of Minnesota - Mpls campus. Students stay in the program for 3 quarters, completing speech, Freshman Comp. (2 quarter sequence), two "lecture" courses which are paired with a reading course which uses the textbook of the "lecture" course, and a remedial-level reading course, and writing/editing course. These last two are offered Fall quarter, before we move into the Freshman writing and content course sequences. (Is this making sense? I'm typing in a hurry here before class starts)

Anyway.... students typically hate the Fall quarter reading course, because it's non-credit and dull. So we thought doing something more interesting would help. We also felt that our students don't do enough reading, or writing, and that for those who are just arriving in the U.S. especially, pushing fluency would be a good approach. So we re-designed the reading course:

Thousand Pieces of Gold (+ video)
Group Projects (researching various immigration stories/issues)
Bread Givers (Yezierska) (+ Hester Street as a video?)

So far, the response from the reading teachers has been very enthusiastic. I sense from the students that the reading course is going well, but don't have any formal feedback from them yet. The enthusiasm is over the level of interest, class discussions, engagement, and amount of writing and reading being done. We'll know more in a month when we have evaluated the course.

I have to run. Let me know if there are specific questions you'd like answered. I'll be back at the machine later this afternoon. --Robin Murie



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FLIER ADVERTISING FLUENCY FIRST WORKSHOPS



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***Teachers comment on Fluency First:***

The Fluency First sets lofty goals which inspire students. The outlines of this program presume that students can develop into competent readers, articulate writers, and ultimately, critical thinkers. This is idealism at its best.

*Elizabeth Ames,*
*New School for Social Research*

In Fluency First, learning is demystified for both teacher and student. As part of the seminars, I learned how I learn and how to observe learning in the classroom.

*Chris Knight*
*Borough of Manhattan Community College*

The Fluency First program has allowed students to freely express their ideas first, then worry about correctness later. With this approach, students tend to write more and their writing seems more interesting and free flowing instead of being stiff.

*Shireen Tannu,*
*The City College of New York*

On of the things I learned is that students are a lot more creative than I thought they were in their writing. This seminar made me look once again at the way I teach writing (and I've been teaching writing for 20 years), and it helped me to refocus on process: if a student understands process, coherent products follow.

*Jack Gantzer,*
*LaGuardia Community College*

Fluency First has allowed me to encourage students to write vast amounts because I don't have to correct every word; they learn to write by writing a lot.

*Jack W. Richmond,*
*The City College of New York*



***This is what students say about the Fluency First approach:***

At the beginning I thought it was crazy to write 50 pages in one class, but then at the end you see that those pages turn to be rewarding because the more you practice the more you learn.

*Almonte Gilberto*

In the beginning it's very difficult to read all the books- hard books! It was really hard for 2 or 3 weeks and then it was easy. It really surprised me and I couldn't understand how I could read without a dictionary but I can.

*Larisa Palvanova*

I learned a lot from classmates in group more that the teacher. I feel that if she stood in front of the class and talked I wouldn't have learned so much. We could have got her ides, we wouldn't get what the class thinks—all the different ideas.

*Luciana Destin*

It's good in a way for the teacher not to correct grammar because it gives the opportunity for students to find their own mistakes and learn from them. We can help point out mistakes but they learn better if they correct them. Then you learn because you have to learn.

*Fernando Almanzar*

I learned English in China. You didn't have any chance to talk. Here we have chance to talk in groups and do lots of reading and writing. This helps me more.

*Yang Wenjie*

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# WHOLE LANGUAGE METHODS IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

# *Fluency First*

## FACULTY DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS FOR ESL TEACHERS

### *What is whole language?*

Whole language is an approach to language instructions that builds on the strengths of the learner and integrates all language "skills".

With a whole language approach, students and teachers collaborate in the learning process, thus changing the roles that teachers and students have traditionally played in the classroom.

### *What is Fluency First?*

Fluency First is a whole language approach to ESL instruction that immerses students in massive amounts of English; they read 1,000 pages of fiction or nonfiction and write 10,000 words or more each term.

At lower levels, instruction focuses on developing students' fluency in English, that is, on their ability to speak or write their ideas without being blocked by an emphasis on correctness.

At the middle level, instruction focuses on developing students' clarity in English, that is, on their ability to make what they say or write more clear and complete for their listeners or readers.

At the higher levels, instruction focuses on developing students' correctness in English. The emphasis here is on



### *The Fluency-First Project*

Faculty from the Department of English as a Second Language at City College, CUNY, are offering a faculty development program for teachers interested in using a whole-language, fluency-first approach in their classes.

The program consists of a series of workshops, supplemented by readings in theory and methods of whole language instruction. Participants keep teaching logs and reading journals which workshop leaders read and respond to. Whenever possible, workshop leaders will observe participants' classes.

This program is available on-site for language programs with a least 10 faculty members participating both within or outside the New York City metropolitan area.

Within the New York City metropolitan area, on-site programs consist of ten 2-hour workshops during the academic year. Outside the New York City metropolitan area, programs consist of two 2-day workshops scheduled during the academic year.

Individual teachers may participate in the workshop series offered yearly at CCNY.

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### *Costs*

On-site workshops
- NYC Metropolitan Area:
  - $3000 (per 10-15 participants)
- Outside NYC:
  - $2500, plus travel expenses for workshop leaders (per 10-15 participants)

CCNY workshops:
- $350 (per individual participant)
- Application fee: $5

Materials fee:
- $50 (for first 15 participants)

Fees subject to change.

### *Project Directors*

Dr. Elizabeth Rorschach,
Assoc. Prof. of ESL at CCNY

Dr. Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly,
Assoc. Prof. of ESL at CCNY

Dr. Susan Hopper-Weil
Asst. Prof. of ESL at CCNY

If you wish to obtain an application for the faculty development workshops, or more information about the Fluency-First approach or the workshops, please write to:

Dr. Elizabeth Rorschach
FIPSE Fluency-First Project
ESL Department, R5/218
The City College of New York, CUNY
138th St. & Convent Ave.
New York, N.Y. 10031

OUTSIDE EVALUATOR'S REPORT



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October 31, 1993
Linda Hirsch, Ph.D.

# EVALUATION OF CCNY'S FIPSE PROJECT:

# FLUENCY FIRST IN ESL INSTRUCTION

The Fluency First ESL Model was initially funded by FIPSE in the Fall of 1990, though actual implementation began as a pilot project in 1989. The Fluency First curriculum in ESL instruction is a whole language approach to writing and reading and is modeled on the fluency, clarity, correctness sequence suggested by Mayher, Lester, and Pradl in Learning to Write/Writing to Learn.

*Fluency*, the goal of ESL 10, is defined as the ability to generate one's ideas in writing intelligibly and with relative ease, and to comprehend popular fiction with similar ease. *Clarity*, the goal of ESL 20, is defined as the ability to write expository pieces that are clear, well-developed, complete, and logically organized. Correctness, or the ability to write expressively and expositorily with a minimum of non-grammatical or mechanical errors is stressed in ESL 30, a course whose principal focus is to prepare students to pass a writing test which requires them to write a 350-word persuasive piece that is judged error-free in 50 minutes.

This examination of the program has included a review of all data available, interviews with teachers and administrators, observations of classes, the analysis of classroom and interview audio


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tapes, and the development and administration of an evaluation questionnaire.

On the basis of all available information, qualitative and quantitative, and judging by the stated criteria in the original grant proposal, it is the evaluator's view that the Fluency First program has successfully met its objectives and provides ESL educators and administrators with a model for ESL reading and writing instruction that appears superior to traditional approaches.

## QUANTITATIVE ANALYSES

The data base consists of the following numbers of students for each year with 1989 considered the initial year of "Fluency First" offerings and 1990 representing the conversion of all ESL courses into a "Fluency First" curriculum:

| | N |
|---|---|
| 1983 | 815 |
| 1986 | 820 |
| 1990 | 524 |
| 1991 | 853 |

1. The data reflects the greater success obtained by students in the Fluency First program with regard to passing the four basic writing courses: ESL 10, ESL 20, ESL 30, and ENG 101.

In 1983, [illegible] passed the four basic courses in one try. In 1986, 41.5% (341 out of 820) passed all in one attempt. By 1990, 45 or 8.59% of the 524 students passed in one try. In 1991, the number was 53 out of 853, or 6.21%.



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Assuming the demands placed upon students in the Fluency First model are equal to if not greater than previous ESL instructional models, the progression supports the view that the newer approach to ESL instruction better prepares students to meet course exit criteria and the demands of ENG 110.

The progression appears as follows:

| | Number and percentage of students passing all four writing courses in one try | |
|---|---|---|
| 1983 | 19 | 1.96% |
| 1986 | 41 | 5% |
| 1990 | 45 | 8.59% |
| 1991 | 83 | 6.21% |

If a more in depth look at student success is obtained when figures are compared for student pass rates in ESL 30. In 1983 only 38.04% of students who took all three ESL writing courses passed ESL 30 in one attempt. That figure jumped to 77% by 1991.

The progression appears as follows:

| | Took 3 Courses | Passed ESL 30 in One Try | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1983 | 184 | 70 | 38.04% |
| 1986 | 250 | 138 | 55.2% |
| 1990 | 302 | 178 | 58.94% |
| 1990 | 200 | 47 | 32.44% |
| 1991 | 300 | 231 | 77.00% |

The decline in 1990 appears to be an anomaly and probable causes should be investigated.



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Data reveals similar progress for students who took ESL 20 and ESL 30.

| | Took 2 Courses | Passed ESL 20 in One Try | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1983 | 331 | 171 | 51.6% |
| 1986 | 234 | 130 | 55.5% |
| 1989 | 222 | 134 | 60.3% |
| 1990 | 202 | 145 | 71.78% |
| 1991 | 188 | 161 | 85.60% |

III. These trends are further underscored by the fact that the average number of times an ESL student takes ENG 110, the Freshman Year English course, has decreased as well. In 1983, ESL students took ENG 110 an average of 1.47 times while that number decreased to an average of 1.07 times by 1991, a 27% decrease.

| | Average Attempts Before Passing ENG 110 |
|---|---|
| 1983 | 1.47 |
| 1986 | 1.28 |
| 1989 | 1.31 |
| 1990 | 1.29 |
| 1991 | 1.07 |

IV. The Skills Assessment Test (SKAT) is a mandatory exam for students exiting ESL 30 and entering ENG 110. Data indicates that the average number of times an ESL 30 student took the SKAT before passing has decreased 83% since the inception of the Fluency First program. This is a dramatic decrease which points to the model's effectiveness.

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| | Average Attempts Before Passing the SKAT |
|---|---|
| 1983 | 4.56 |
| 1984 | 4.7 |
| 1985 | 4.53 |
| 1986 | 4.38 |
| 1987 | 4.21 |
| 1988 | 4.02 |
| 1989 | 3.68 |
| 1990 | 2.97 |
| 1991 | 2.41 |

## QUALITATIVE ANALYSES

### Questionnaires

In spring, 1993, a questionnaire was developed and administered to students enrolled in ESL 10, ESL 20 and ESL 30. Part I elicited background information about the number of semesters the student had been attending City College and the numbers and kinds of ESL courses previously taken. Part II sought to assess student perceptions as to the project's effectiveness and consisted of 10 questions each on a 4 point scale. Part III allowed for open-ended comments. (See Appendix for sample questionnaire.)

The questionnaire was administered to 123 students, 14 of whom were registered in ESL 10, 73 of whom were in ESL 20 and 36 of whom were enrolled in ESL 30.

Overall, 99% of respondents felt their ESL class improved their ability to write in English and 98% agreed that the class improved their ability to speak in English. In addition, 94% said their class improved their ability to read in English.



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The success of this model is no doubt enhanced by the positive affective climate it produced. Only 11% of all respondents felt uncomfortable speaking in class with 90% stating they expressed their opinions in the ESL class. Indeed, 94% felt they had a responsibility to contribute to the class discussions.

These positive findings are all the more significant in light of the fact that most students found the ESL courses quite demanding. Over half felt the courses weren't easy for them, and 87% felt there was more material to learn in their class than in other courses. This was especially true for those enrolled in ESL 10 (100%) and ESL 20 (91%).

Ninety two per cent of respondents liked the way their classes were run and 96% said they would recommend their class to ESL students. These high levels of satisfaction are quite impressive.

Student comments in the open-ended section of the questionnaire were also quite positive in their evaluation of the ESL class. Below are some typical responses which are reprinted as they appear on the questionnaires with grammar and spelling errors uncorrected.

ESL 10

"Although I needed to do many works in this program and they were not easy to finish, I learnt more than in Hunter College when I compared the 2 semesters."

"Best class I ever had. Moreno pushed us alot to produce alot of writting and reading. I learned I can write whatever I want now.


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Also. I read and understand more now. I read seven books in Moreno's class. She insisted and we knew she was right."

"At the beginning of that class, I could not read and write very well, but this ESL 10 class helped me alot to get improved. Now I know how to read and write..."

"I think ESL 10...was the best class in City College. Because as a student, I had my own responsibility to do my work and helped by the professor and by the tutor...The class wasn't easy either, but I think that it was in my power to decide for my own good..."

ESL 20

"My comments...are to continue the way is now. This will help a lot of students to feel free to speak, read, write and give their opinions in English...I think it will be better if the students would colaberate with the teacher more. Some of the teacher try to do the best for us to learn..."

"I was pleased to attend ESL 20 it helps me in a lot of ways. Be an immigrant, it was better and more confortable to express my self in the ESL class. I don't care to make any mistake, because noone was that perfect."

"I enjoyed this class so much. We did many writhings this semester, and the professor always gave nice comments to them. We were given a lot of homeworks, but I think the hard work improved my writing and reading skills. I think I'll continue writing the journal during the summer."

"There are sometimes ESL teachers who want students to think and write like they do. That is wrong. Students should be themselves."


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If there are some teachers like that. please make them attend our teacher's class. They will find how stupid they are."

"This time was hard and helpful the same time. I'm really appreciate your job, professor. It isn't easy way to teach, but I did it exelent for us. Thank you."

"...I feil more comfortable when I talk to somebody and also when I'm writing about whatever subject, because I'm sure I have more vocabulary and a better grammar. Thanks to ESL 20 class."

There were few complaints. Of these, criticisms focused on a desire for more grammar instruction, fewer readings and the suggestion that the ESL 20 "should be limited to practising multiple choices question."

ESL 30

"I have learned more English. But also, I have learned how to use computers to work in an organized way. I really felt very good to study in this class."

"I felt that I have learned alot of things like reading books and making comments of it in the computer. I would like to recommend students to take this course because it's good for you and it as also required."

Overall, analyses of the questionnaires indicate that as a group learners felt their writing, reading, and speaking skills improved as a result of taking the ESL course. In spite of their perceptions as to the difficulty of the courses and the work being demanded of them,



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students consistently praised their teachers and credited their classes with improving their English-language performance.

**Classroom Observations and Analyses**

The evaluator observed both an ESL 10 and an ESL 20 class. In person observation and analyses of audio-tapes indicated that teachers created a student-centered, language-rich atmosphere in which students were encouraged to participate and be supportive of each other. Students were observed working collaboratively with partners and in small groups. Materials used were consonant with the project's whole-language, fluency-first approach. Students were observed interacting with written texts and using a variety of writing and reading strategies. More in-depth analyses appears below.

1. Observation of Professor A. Tillyer's ESL 10 Class

The class, which ran from 8:45 to 10:50 a.m., examined E.M. Forster's, A Room with a View in both its novel and cinematic forms. The observer was immediately struck by the selection of this book for an ESL 10 class as most traditional ESL programs would have considered it too linguistically advanced for lower-level ESL students.

Prior to the class meeting, students had worked in pairs to select either favorite passages or ones they found significant to read and discuss in class. In class, teams read their passages aloud and explored why they had selected them. The class was characterized by much student participation and open and far-reaching discussions


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as students were helped to distinguish between the author's point of view and their own interpretations.

To facilitate pupil comprehension of the text, instruction was supplemented by viewing the film version of "A Room with a View." The instructor frequently stopped the film to ask questions, e.g. "Does Lucy look the way you imagined her?" "Who was Beethoven?" She also made comparisons between the film and the book as to character development. Homework was dictated and then read back by students. Called "thinking homework," students were asked to consider "Why did Forster make Lucy good at playing the piano?"

Students spent the last hour of the class on an E-mail project in which they corresponded with pen pals at Boston University. The observer was not present for this activity.

It had been the observer's assumption that in order to handle the reading assignments required of this model, ESL students in the project would be better prepared or more advanced than others. Classroom observation revealed this not to be the case. Students were seen struggling with the pronunciation and comprehension of unfamiliar words. What was distinctive was their motivation and determination to do so and their ultimate success in negotiating this text.

II. Observation of Professor Knight's ESL 20 Class

Working toward the goal of *clarity*, students in ESL 20 must bridge the gap from reading fiction and writing in descriptive and narrative modes to writing and reading for academic purposes.



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**Writing includes analyses, summaries, syntheses, and other material requiring more critical thinking.**

Reflecting the kinds of work deemed appropriate for this level, the evaluator observed students working on summarizing six articles (three newspaper and three magazine) on pre-selected topics. The information obtained from the articles would later be integrated into an 800 word essay. The teacher walked around the room to help groups with the task. She asked students to consider what the articles had in common. Students later read each other's summaries.

Representing a variety of cultures (Israeli, Dominican, African, Asian), all students spoke English, the target language. Their talk was purposeful and focused on the organization of their projects. For example, in one group, students divided up the tasks of typing and editing the summaries.

Students in this class were working toward the goal of completing a community-oriented "Collaborative Action Plan." Students were grouped thematically and read and wrote about their topic, e.g. "Homelessness," "Art, Architecture, Stamps, Bridges," "Child Development and Education." After groups determined the focus of their plan and the impact they wanted to create, they were asked to select possible strategies. These included producing a flyer, taking a survey of student or community opinions, and creating a photo-essay.

After students had spent about an hour working on their summaries, the class moved into a discussion of Malcolm X. Working from their double-entry reading journals, students had twenty-five minutes to discuss the assigned chapter with group members and


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generate at least one question per group. Questions ranged from the following:

"What does it mean YWCA?"

"Who is Uncle Tom?"

"What is the main reason in which Mr. Malcolm builted Mosques"?

"Will Malcolm X agree the 'integration' if the white society is not corrupt?"

"Why is Malcolm X try to separate the black poeple from the sociaty?"

As a class, students formed a circle and discussed the questions on the board. In line with a student-centered pedagogy, the instructor positioned herself at the rear of the circle. Attention did not focus on her; rather students learned from each other. "Address Judi," she said in response to a student statement directed towards her.

The teacher's questions were intended to be thought-provoking, and they sparked lively discussion.

Following is a brief excerpt from the class:

In response to the teacher's prompt, "Where does Malcolm X get money for his private jet?" the following discussion ensued:

S1: I think he's a thief. He stole money from the Muslim people.

S2: I think that it's fundraising.

S3: Money should be for a good reason. Not for buying a jet.



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S4: I agree with Ahmed. The money is for the mosque, not his personal things.

S5: Some followers insist he move to a bigger house. They want him to be better.

The amount of writing, speaking, reading, and listening done by ESL students in this class was impressive. Talking was communicative and purposeful. Learning was achieved in a whole-language, collaborative setting. The activities integrated all language skills. They were meaning-driven, learner-centered, and required an active approach to learning in which the target language was used as the medium of thought and communication.

## Teacher Interviews

To obtain faculty perspective on the Fluency First Model, four faculty members were interviewed in a group setting. Their collective experiences covered all levels of ESL, and some had taught courses both before and after the implementation of the Fluency First Model. No project administrators were present, and interviews were audio-taped. Interviewees were asked their teaching status, what ESL courses they taught, and how long they had been teaching at CCNY. Teachers were asked to compare the Fluency First pedagogy with other methods of ESL instruction, and to discuss its strengths and weaknesses. They commented on the kind of training they received prior to teaching a Fluency First class and its usefulness in the classroom. All appeared to be extremely dedicated to their students and to successfully implementing this curriculum. In



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addition, they showed an awareness of the problems confronted by ESL students and a sensitivity to their needs.

Instructors viewed the project's major strength as its shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered classroom which stressed student responsibility for learning. Teachers felt this model better prepared students for college by increasing the amounts of reading and writing required and by giving them the autonomy and independence to follow-through on their tasks. The increase in reading and writing was seen as leading to better writers. A student was quoted as observing," I've never even read a book in my own language, but now I'm reading four or five in English." One professor noted the project was especially helpful for foreign students who knew English but hadn't used it as intensively.

Teachers stated that the model did present difficulties for busy students with many outside responsibilities, and they often fell behind and couldn't cope. One instructor commented that it was also hard to convince students of the benefits of collaborative learning and the project's deemphasis on grammar instruction. In addition, some felt that peer-correction was not always beneficial. All teachers stated that their paper-work had increased as well.

In comparing the pedagogies used at CCNY, interviewees stated that while the Fluency First model demanded more work and more energy of them, their students were making more progress. Writing was more interesting and thoughtful regardless of errors. Students had greater self-assurance and self-esteem. Indeed, faculty stated that the project's entire philosophy, including its emphasis on risk-taking and collaborative learning, were crucial to its success.


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Accounting for the project's success, one instructor said, "It's a philosophy of learning, not just teaching. You have a chance to watch students who are thinking about what they're doing. It's so different from the sterility of a classroom where students' energies are not on thinking."

Faculty regarded their training as highly effective and intrinsic to the project's success. Workshops provided faculty with opportunities to talk about teaching and student needs as well as providing a forum for the sharing of ideas. The workshops gave faculty a sense of collegiality and adjuncts, in particular, felt that they were treated as professionals.

Instructors identified as the most useful aspects of training workshops the opportunity to talk to colleagues, to get ideas about activities and books to use, and to get suggestions on how to cope with the paper-work. Faculty also greatly benefited from their teacher logs in which they noted observations about themselves and their classes. Teachers said they enjoyed their roles as "reflective practitioners."

## Administrator Interviews

I held formal interviews with Dr. Carole Riedler-Berger, ESL Department Chairperson, and Drs. Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly and Elizabeth Rorschach, Co-Directors, Fluency First Project.

### 1. Interview with Dr. Carole Riedler-Berger

Throughout our discussion, Dr. Riedler-Berger's respect and support for the project were evident. As Chairperson, she has the overall responsibility for the Department's ESL curriculum and must


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ensure that it responds to student needs. She was extremely knowledgeable as to the kinds of ESL pedagogies that had been used at the College and was able to place the Fluency Model within this perspective.

Dr. Riedler-Berger perceived the project's greatest strength in providing a model for teaching which leads to student empowerment. She viewed the project as complementing a whole-language pedagogy which was already gaining favor at the time of the project's implementation. She observed that the Fluency First model made teachers more aware of their teaching styles and led to more student-centered classrooms. In addition, student language learning was enhanced by the project's focus on the inter-relatedness of reading and writing.

The Chairperson had the highest praise for the Project's Co-Directors, Drs. MacGowan-Gilhooly and Rorschach, and noted that the project's recognition by others outside of City College had enhanced the Department's reputation.

Dr. Riedler-Berger saw the project as especially beneficial for the lower level ESL 10 students. Its emphasis on fluency resulted in more verbal, relaxed and confident ESL learners. She observed that the emphasis in ESL 30 had to be on clarity and correctness, but she expressed some concern that there might not be sufficient time in ESL 30 to address students' grammar needs and that perhaps a more conscious teaching of grammar in context might need to begin earlier. Since the project's inception, Dr. Riedler-Berger observed that students who passed ESL 30 and entered ENG 110 were coming in at higher levels and doing better. However, some were still reticent in



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English. The Chairperson made the valuable recommendation that ESL students in ENG 110 be provided with support groups and tutoring for their English-language content courses, which may ultimately be paired with ESL courses and that they receive group counseling to help them deal with this transition from an ESL environment to one which mainstreams them with native speakers.

Dr. Riedler-Berger maintained that the Fluency First Model will remain after FIPSE funding. She noted unanticipated benefits of FIPSE funding including the creation of an atmosphere of exploration which has enabled faculty to experiment with new strategies and incorporate them in ways compatible with their own styles. The project's climate of student empowerment and openness to new ideas had also coincided with the Department's leadership in the area of computer technology. In addition, Dr. Riedler-Berger has obtained grant monies to create interactive lasers which will focus on such topics of student concern as registration and American dating customs. All of these projects build on and enhance the power of the Fluency First Model.

II. Interviews with Dr. Adele MacGowen Gilhooly and Dr. Elizabeth Rorschach

During the Spring Semester, 1993, I held a formal interview as well as several informal ones with Dr. Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly and Dr. Elizabeth Rorschach, Co-Directors of the Fluency First Project. Dr. MacGowan-Gilhooly's background includes extensive experience in teacher training and research. The recipient of FIPSE funding for her project, "Teaching from Strengths," she has also written two textbooks which complement the "Fluency" and "Clarity" levels of the


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ESL program. Dr. Rorschach, too, has great experience in teacher training as well as composition theory. She has been actively involved in the New York City Writing Project and was trained by them to run workshops and seminars for teachers. Both Dr. Rorschach and Dr. MacGowan-Gilholy have been frequent presenters at national and regional conferences.

I could not help but be impressed with how well-informed, articulate, and committed they were. Their thorough backgrounds in ESL theory and pedagogy and considerable experience in working with ESL students are widely reflected in the success of this project. They were extremely cooperative during the course of this evaluation and arranged for me to meet with all faculty and administers I requested to see and to observe and audio-tape classes.

Having begun this as a pilot project, they were intimately aware of its evolution and had closely monitored its expansion with a keen eye towards its effectiveness as a teaching model. Through their efforts, faculty involved with the project received excellent training and feedback. This was underscored by interviews in which teachers credited their training as crucial to the project's success. (See **Teacher Interviews** above.) As Course Coordinators for ESL 10 and ESL 20, they continue to mentor teachers and see that faculty are aware of the project's expectations. In addition, they conduct faculty workshops for faculty at other CUNY campuses to aid in the project's implementation. (See **Faculty Development Workshops** below.)

In the course of our discussions, the Project Directors emphasized the project's success in meeting its objectives and



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discussed those factors which they felt were responsible for its success. They viewed their key tasks as "training, dissemination, and keeping the curriculum going." They both attributed faculty development efforts and administrative support as vital elements in the project's implementation.

Fully aware of the difficulties inherent in implementing change, the Project Directors underscored their belief that faculty should participate in training because they want to, and once involved, should receive on-going support. In addition, faculty should have opportunities for input into curriculum development and collaboration with colleagues. The Co-Directors were cognizant of the different teaching styles and personalities each instructor brings to the classroom and believed that faculty should be encouraged to find ways to feel comfortable with this new pedagogy and make it their own. Interviews with faculty confirmed that the Project Directors were very successful in this approach. The Project Directors recommended that other campuses seeking to replicate this model should undertake a collaborative effort to tailor the model to their unique needs.

When asked to articulate the project's greatest strengths, the Co-Directors pointed to its success in improving ESL students' academic performance and the high regard for the project both within City College and other campuses nation-wide.

It is my assessment that the Fluency First Project could not have been in safer hands.


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## Faculty Development Workshops

In the project's second and third years, the Co-Directors sought to extend the training of faculty beyond City College and help teachers at other colleges implement this model. For year two, their goal was to offer training to twenty faculty from various other CUNY colleges. Each trainee would attend ten two-hour workshops over the two semesters, innovate with whole-language activities, record in their teaching logs classroom activities as well as observations of student reaction to experimental techniques, be observed, and meet with one of the Project Directors to discuss their data. Participants would receive a stipend of $1000 and a copy of the recommended text.

In the project's third year, workshops would be offered to New York City public school teachers, in conjunction with the New York City Project.

My interviews with faculty at City College and a survey of responses to a questionnaire designed by the Project Directors indicated tremendous satisfaction with the faculty development workshops. Overall, faculty felt the workshops did a wonderful job of familiarizing them with the project's whole-language approach and providing them with the training they needed to successfully implement this curriculum.

Issues of concern focused on the efficacy of group work, a fear of being "locked in" to any one curriculum, including "Fluency First," and a fear that students were not being presented with "higher models," that is, the presentation to students of a passage from a


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book rather than students' writing. With regard to the last concern, it is the evaluator's view that the project's emphasis on reading a variety of fiction and academic writings provides students with many more "higher models" than traditional ESL pedagogies.

To further assess the faculty workshops, and in particular, its impact on faculty at other campuses, I conducted an in-depth interview with Dr. Dorothy Pam, a faculty participant from Hostos Community College/CUNY.

Dr. Pam found out about the workshops via a flier distributed by the Fluency First Project. Her interest in the workshops was piqued by her knowledge of its work through Dr. MacGowan-Gilhooly's articles and presentations at conferences. Dr. Pam said she was intrigued by the notion of trying this project at Hostos, whose student population is well-over 80% Spanish-dominant and whose ESL pedagogy was already moving toward a more holistic approach to language learning.

Her group of five people met on the Bronx Community College campus once a month with Dr. MacGowan-Gilhooly for at least two hours. While adjuncts participating in the workshops received a stipend of $1,000 for the year, Dr. Pam, a full-time professor, received three hours a semester of released-time provided by Hostos. Dr. Pam observed that while these financial incentives were not great, they did facilitate participation in the training.

Citing the workshops' strengths, Dr. Pam remarked that they provided her with model activities for students to do, guidance from an experienced instructor, and the opportunity to share ideas with


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colleagues. For adjuncts, she noted, this was probably one of the few staff development projects available in CUNY.

She was required to keep a written record of her experiences and prepare a final report. At group meetings, participants shared their journals and logs and raised questions of concern. Dr. Pam, in particular, wanted guidelines for responding to student papers and felt the workshops provided her with "a repertoire of supportive comments." In addition, she was observed teaching and received supportive comments by the observer. Dr. Pam also found Dr. MacGowan-Gilhooly's textbook, Achieving Fluency in English, especially useful and required it of her students so that they would be "empowered" by understanding the concepts behind the project.

Dr. Pam pointed out that initially she was dubious the project would be successful at Hostos, and as she anticipated, there was initial student resistance to the increased workload demanded of this model. As she commented, "I certainly never asked anybody before to write me 10,000 words in a book...This was more than we've ever been able to get from Hostos students." Yet her students did complete their assignments. Some wrote books, autobiographies, plays, and magazines.

Her participation in the project convinced her of the value of journal-writing for ESL students and she observed that students' grammar did improve as a result of massive exposure to reading and writing. She was curious to see if her students would do better on their final exams than her students had done in previous years, but this information was not available at the time of our interview.



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In summarizing her assessments of the workshops, Dr. Pam astutely observed, "Change is difficult. Without the workshops, I would have dropped out."

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Qualitative and quantitative findings all point towards the effectiveness of the Fluency First model of ESL instruction at City College. The model has also generated great interest nationally as evidenced by the Project Directors' frequent presentations at conferences and requests for materials.

In view of the project's success and the great interest in it, it is recommended that data continue to be collected and that all data be analyzed for statistical significance. While there are many other valid indicators of the project's success, statistical significance would be another potent argument for the implementation of a Fluency First model.

2. The Project Directors or other researchers may wish to explore the role of overt language learning strategies within the Fluency First paradigm to determine if student application of these strategies, e.g. memory, cognitive, affective, metacognitive, would further strengthen this model.

3. The FIPSE Continuation Award application for this project cited decreases in ESL student attrition as a result of this model. As retention is a major concern on many campuses, it is recommended that more data be collected and analyzed in this area. A model of ESL instruction which increases retention rates would be a significant contribution.



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4. As suggested by the Chair, Dr. Riedler-Berger, it is recommended that tutorial and counseling support be provided for ESL students exiting the ESL Program and entering ENG 110. Tutoring is particularly suggested for their English-language content course.

5. Group work, an important component of this model, was not always helpful in the area of peer-editing. In the ESL 20 class I observed, students "corrected" each other's papers by suggesting changes which were incorrect. A number of faculty workshop participants and instructors in the program commented on this problem, and it may account for some student dissatisfaction with collaborative work. While peer-editing is not the true focus of group work, faculty workshops should alert instructors to some of the difficulties which might occur.

## CONCLUSION

The CCNY FIPSE Project, **Fluency First in ESL Instruction**, is an innovative, exceptional model and has met its stated goals. It provides ESL educators and administrators with a model for learning which is student-centered and incorporates massive exposure to the target language through a whole-language, holistic approach. Its three-level paradigm of *fluency, clarity and correctness* extends to sequence of programs, courses, and papers.

Faculty are dedicated and receive superior training which benefit not only their students but also others who are fortunate enough to work with them. Indeed, in keeping with its objective, the project has developed an ever-growing cadre of instructors who can become resources for their colleagues. Through the tireless efforts of Dr. MacGowan-Gilhooly and Dr. Rorschach, they have been given



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the strategies they need to foster language-rich classrooms in which ESL students trust each other and feel free to express themselves.

The project appears to b equally effective throughout the three levels although a few ESL 30 instructors expressed concern that their students' command of the surface features of writing was a bit lacking. Yet data on student pass rates in the ESL program and in the subsequent ENG 110 indicates the model is very effective in preparing students.

Another significant aspect of evaluation is that students recommend these courses to other students, in spite of the perceived increased workload.

Overall, the project is extremely successful. Its effectiveness has been recognized by the CCNY administration and its continuance is assured through the institutionalization of the courses at the college. The model appears appropriate for ESL students in other college settings and perhaps the high school and primary school levels as well. Many institutions would do well to consider implementation of this approach to ESL language learning. It is hoped that the Co-Directors will continue to disseminate information about the Fluency First approach to second-language acquisition.



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# APPENDIX



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Post-Questionnaire Form

CCNY, "Fluency First" ESL Project (FIPSE)

In order to evaluate the success of the "Fluency First," ESL model, we would appreciate your answering the following questions. Please do not put your name on the paper. Thank you for your cooperation.

Background Information

1. ESL course you are taking this semester_____
2. How many semesters have you been at CCNY?_____
3. What ESL courses, if any, have you taken before this one?_____

---

Directions: Below are a number of statements about the ESL class you have been attending this semester. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each statement by circling one number to the right of each statement that best expresses your opinion.

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The class improved my ability to write in English. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. The class improved my ability to speak in English. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. The class improved my ability to read in English. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I didn't [illegible] participate actively in this class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. I expected to [illegible] in this class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. I liked the way this class was run. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. This course was [illegible] than I [illegible]. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |



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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8. There was more material to learn in this class than in other courses. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. I felt I had a responsibility to contribute to the class discussions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | - |
| 10. I would recommend this class to other ESL students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | - |

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In the spaces provided below, please feel free to make any additional comments you may have regarding your ESL class.



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